

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's parsha Vaiera, 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..."(6:7) The Ibn Ezra explains that the Bnai Yisroel will become a nation when they received the Torah at Har Sinai. Thus we see that the only thing that makes us Hashem's people is our observance of the Torah.

Rabbi Betzallel Shif, the founder of the Ohr Simcha school in Kfar Chabad that has taught thousands of underprivileged Israeli children still has a broken sword somewhere in his house with an interesting story connected to it.

Some fifty years ago the day before Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) the Rabbi was in the airport terminal of Tebilsi (Capital of Georgia- Gruzia) waiting to check in for the flight to Kiev where he had hoped to spend the holiest day of the year with his family. He suddenly discovered that he had somehow misplaced his flight ticket. He left the line, searched his pockets and suitcases but found nothing.

He would have to spend the night in the airport hotel and hope that through some miracle he could catch a plane out the next morning. He was given a small two bed room in the terminal hotel, slept restlessly and woke at dawn to discover that someone else, who had probably missed a plane after his, was sleeping in the other bed. He quietly put on his Talis and Tefillin and faced the corner and prayed the Morning Prayer as silently as possible.

But when he finished he was unpleasantly surprised to see that his 'roommate' had woken and was sitting in a chair, fully dressed in an army uniform, staring at him intently. In Communist Russia this only spelled trouble. The marks on his uniform indicated that he was a colonel.

The colonel asked the Rabbi what he was doing. The Rabbi explained and as he was talking he noticed that the officer's eyes were red and a stream of tears ran down one of his cheeks. When the Rabbi finished explaining, the colonel blew his nose, dried his eyes and asked...if he could put on the Tefillin as well!

Rabbi Shif gave him the Tefillin and Talis, helped the colonel to put them on and after he finished praying and returned the religious items, he shook the Rabbi's hand and asked if he needed anything. Of course Rabbi Shif explained that he desperately needed a flight to Kiev.

The colonel told the Rabbi to follow him, took him outside, led the way to the airfield past several check points to a huge transport plane. He approached a soldier that was apparently standing guard, said a few words to him, turned to Rabbi Shif and said, "Tell this soldier where you want to go and he'll make sure they take you there. Just please do me a favor and give me your address before you leave."

Rabbi Shif gave the colonel his address, boarded the plane and made it home in time for Yom Kippur where the story of how he got there became the talk of the day.

Months passed and he almost forgot the entire incident until just a week before Pesach (Passover) some six months later, there was a knock on his door and when opened it there stood the colonel! They shook hands then hugged each other warmly. Rabbi Shif invited him in and he was straight to the point.

"Rabbi, I want you to return home with me and show my two children and wife what a real Passover Seder night is like. I know what you are thinking, I can assure you that my wife children are Jewish. But neither of us know anything. I mean, I do remember a little but you are a real Rabbi. We will do what you ask us. Money is no problem. What do you say?" But Rabbi Shif had to refuse saying he couldn't leave his old mother alone for Passover. When the Colonel heard this he again almost burst into tears.

"OY! Your mother! Oy! Because I didn't honor my parents they suffered so!" and he began to tell his sad story. He had been born and bred in a Chabad Chassidic family. His grandfather had been a well-known, gifted Chassid by the name of Rabbi Peretz Chein, and his parents who had great hopes for him, gave him the same name. They were sure he, too, would be a Chabad Chassid; devoted to making the world a better place according to the Torah, like his grandfather.

But it wasn't to be. When pogroms struck the big cities and his family had to flee to the suburbs where there weren't so many Jews, he became distant from Judaism and close with a lot of gentiles, especially a fellow his age called Peter.

Peter's grandfather had been a ranking officer in the Czar's navy, and his goal in life was to be just like him and, unfortunately he eventually got Peretz enthused as well. Peretz's parents protested but they were helpless. Together he and Peter enlisted in the navy and began to rise up in the ranks until both became officers, each receiving a coveted golden handled sword made of the finest tempered steel.

The sword became Peretz's pride and joy to the point that several times a year he would return home in full uniform, his glistening sword dangling from his side and strut about like a rooster showing off his uniform, shiny high boots and sword to the Chassidim who pretended to be interested but in fact couldn't have cared

Mazal Tov to Avrohom Duvid Wolfberg on the occasion on his chasuna

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less. But all this was in total rebellion against his parent's wishes; they begged him not to join the navy and pleaded with him to leave as soon as possible, but he ignored them.

Each time he returned home all the Chassidim tried to just say hello and be friendly so as not to drive him away but finally one Chassid by the name of Itzic Raskin couldn't hold himself back. "What is that stupid sword doing on you?" he shouted at Peretz in front of everyone.

"Aren't you ashamed?! The grandson of Peretz Chein with a sword? Phhheh!" Peretz left the room blazing with anger and at that moment decided he would cut the cord. He had been shamed!! He changed his name to Pheter, stopped doing all the commandments and resolved to erase his 'useless' Jewish identity.

But a catastrophe brought him back... Years later, after he and his friend Peter rose to the level of majors they got a pleasant surprise; it was announced that Stalin (cursed be he) was going to make a personal visit to their base. Of course everyone worked feverishly to polish and prepare every inch of the place for 'Father Stalin' but then, unexplainably, Pheter's good friend Peter disappeared for over a week. Pheter asked around for an explanation but the only one given was that he had been drafted for a top secret job.

The days passed and one day before the awaited visit, a group of KGB agents visited the base which was routine before such an important occasion. They began questioning the officers one by one in private but when it came Pheter's turn things turned a bit sour. They began telling him details of his life that no one knew, except for his friend Peter.

Obviously they just wanted to show him who was boss. There was nothing in their tone that was incriminating or unfriendly but it was certainly embarrassing. Peter had betrayed their friendship! Pheter went to his room, thought about what happened and began to get angry. After all he had done for Mother Russia! For the navy, was this a way to be treated? Who needs this crazy government?!

Suddenly the words of Itzic Raskin rang in his ears "What is that stupid sword doing on you? Aren't you ashamed? The grandson of Peretz Chein with a sword? Phhheh !"

In a fit of insanity he pulled out the sword, stuck it deeply into the wooden floor and pushed it to a side until it broke almost in half. Then he took the unbroken half and began hacking away madly against a metal pipe in his room until it was dull, chipped and almost useless and his anger subsided. Suddenly a whistle blew! Stalin was here! Pheter, came to himself, put the half-sword back in it's sheath, put on his white dress coat, straightened it out and rushed out the door, his high leather boots clicking loudly as he went. But when he arrived in the greeting room Stalin wasn't there, only the KGB agents...and Peter.

They read aloud, "The following officers will follow us for intensive interrogation." And they read out five names, one of which was Pheter's." The Admiral of the base stepped forward and angrily shouted at the agents. "What do you want from these men!? Do you want to ruin our navy?! These are the best men in the service! They are loyal soldiers of Mother Russia and devoted party members! What is their crime?!?"

"Their crime?" said the KGB agent, looking knowingly at Peter as the other agents put their hands on their gun holsters, "Their crime is...Conspiracy to murder Comrade Stalin!!" But the Admiral did not lose his composure. He angrily replied, "Nonsense! Pure nonsense! And tell me, comrade, tell us all, how, in your imagination did they plan to carry out this crime?"

"How?" Replied the agent with a smirk. "With THIS!" he exclaimed as he approached Pheter, deftly pulled Pheter's sword from its sheath and held it up victoriously. He narrowed his eyes as he hissed at Pheter. "You thought no one would suspect your sword didn't you?!"

But suddenly he felt that something was wrong, he looked at what he was holding in his hand and gasped. "No one could kill anyone with such a sword! The Admiral yelled angrily." "No, no!" The KGB agent tried to think fast and justify himself. "This criminal, he knew we suspected him! That's why he broke the sword." "Fool!!" Yelled the Admiral, "If he really had such a stupid plan and really thought you suspected him then he wouldn't have brought his sword at all, would he!? Now get out!"

Pheter (now Peretz again) continued, "It was a miracle! And the shouted words of that Chassid Raskin saved me! On that day I decided to return to Judaism but I didn't know how. I simply kept putting it off for years until I saw you back then in the airport I knew it was another miracle.

Pheter was in constant contact with Rabbi Shif from then on. He changed his name back to Peretz and returned totally to Judaism and, as a sign of appreciation, gave Rabbi Shif his broken sword as a present. After the iron curtain fell he moved with his family to Florida and the two of them are still in close contact.

Torah and Mitzvahs are our marching orders as Jews. Even though Jews may be involved in all sorts of philanthropic and political causes and movements, it is the Torah alone which continues to guide us as a Nation. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**

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