

that he considered a prophecy, Minna told us. In his dream, he had seen a twenty-pointed star and he was told to gather many, many people together in this place in the Mexican desert. Right now he was down in the center of the clearing, setting up a large replica of that star on the ground. In the morning, the Native American healing rituals would begin under his direction. Minna stayed a while longer and talked to us by the light of our campfire. She told us about the Native American calendar and we told her about the Jewish calendar, Lahavdil.

After Minna said good night, I went down to the gathering to find Red Feather. I found him marking off a large circle about twenty meters in diameter. It was surrounded by twenty-eight two meter-high branches, whittled down very straight and smooth. Beside each branch was a pole stuck in the ground with a little sack of tobacco tied on top of it. The poles were connected to each other by a string decorated with feathers.

Inside the circle, cornmeal was spread over the hard earth with designs drawn in it. The fragrance of burning sage was everywhere. Red Feather was deep in concentration, reconstructing his vision of the twenty-eight-pointed star. I guessed he was in his thirties, a short, very intense man with long, braided, dusty-blond hair. He didn't look Indian either, except in his dress. I walked into his line of vision, knowing not to get too close, and watched him silently.

I knew Indians. I had taught them in the Alaskan countryside. Indians don't like idle talk. I watched him work and waited for him to be the first to speak. "This star came to me in a vision," Red Feather said at last.

I replied in tight-jawed, sparse, Indian-style English. "Met your mother," He nodded. "She's Jewish." Again he nodded. "You're Jewish."

"Yes," he answered.

"Do you know Shema Yisrael?" I asked.

"No." "Do you know the Hebrew letters?" "No." "Do you know who Abraham is?" "No." "Moses?"

"No. I just know a little about the Merkava. I think the star in my vision is like it." He was speaking about the holy chariot seen in a vision by the prophet Yechezkel thousands of years ago. The Merkava is understood only by the greatest Jewish Kabbalists. It rides in worlds that we cannot enter while we are on this earth, and its secrets are among the deepest mysteries that will be revealed to all with the coming of Mashiach.

I saw that Red Feather liked to work with his hands. He liked to bring the spiritual down into the physical. While he worked, I talked to him about the mitzvahs a man like him would appreciate. I told him about the spirituality of tefillin, tzitzis talis, the city of Jerusalem, and the Holy Temple.

He listened intently. He wanted to put on my tefillin and was disappointed to hear that it could only be done in the daytime.

"Tomorrow there will be a big medicine dance," he said. "We break at noon for fifteen minutes. Is that enough time?"

"Yes," I answered, "if there is a quiet place nearby where no one will disturb us." Early in the morning before the others woke up, I prayed shacharis. Then we packed up our car. Hundreds of people were awake by then, drumming and dancing to a mind-numbing beat. We heard they'd be sacrificing buffalo hearts on an altar and doing who knows what other idol worship. We needed to get out of there, but I had made my promise to Red Feather. So we kept our children close to the tent and stayed far away from the dangerous, dark rituals.

At twelve o'clock noon I walked to our meeting place by the star. Red Feather was there. "It's time. Come," I said, tight jawed. Red Feather took the lead and led me down a dusty trail to a secluded area out of view and far enough away to soften the pounding of the incessant drumming. I took the talis and draped it over his head. He repeated the blessing after me. I spoke to him about the ten sefiros, the ten Kabbalistic spheres. Then I took the tefillin out and told him about chesed (kindness), gevura (strength), and tiferes (splendor). Red Feather repeated the Hebrew blessings after me and I tightened the black leather straps on his left hand. Placing the head tefillin on his brow, I told him about chochma (wisdom), bina (understanding), daas (knowledge), and malchus (kingship).

Then the young Indian chief, wrapped in my talis and tefillin, sat with me on a long rock and we said Shema. I suggested some powerful images for him to keep in mind while he meditated. Then I walked off into the brush, leaving him alone to pray to his Creator as a Jew for the first time. Ten minutes later, Red Feather was still motionless. I gave him another ten minutes.

Meanwhile, back at my family's campsite, Rachel could hear people calling for Red Feather. Everyone was looking for him. She chuckled. If only they knew what Red Feather was doing right then. I checked on Red Feather again, He was still deep in meditation. Quietly, I sat down beside him. After a few minutes, I began to hum a niggun, a spiritual Jewish melody. Then I recited a psalm. He didn't move. I told a story about the Baal Shem Tov. He still didn't move.

Finally Red Feather spoke. He was very shaken. "My ancestors were calling me," he said. "I saw a vision of a woman with her hair covered. I have to learn more! Please stay after all the people leave and teach me more about my people and our way of prayer."

"I can't stay," I said softly. "The rituals done here are not the ways of the Torah. I must take my wife and children away. Our Creator has brought us together. How are we to know when His plan for us has been completed? Maybe we have accomplished our purpose in each other's lives. I must go."

Red Feather broke into tears and hugged me. I let him cry for some time. Then I gently took the talis and tefillin off him. We walked back to the gathering together and said our good-byes. I made sure to give him my phone number.

Red Feather never called. Later we moved and our phone number changed. But I know that just as Hashem sent me to Red Feather at that moment in his life, so too will Hashem provide Red Feather with all the help he needs to come back to his people and his heritage. (Editor's note: All names in the story are fictitious; all the details really happened. The narrator of the story is a resident of Tsfas. The writer, Chana Besser, is also a Tsfas resident.) Let us recite the Shema everyday, twice a day, and cry out our perfect faith in Hashem, the One and Only G-d. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**