

**Good Shabbos Everyone.** Chanukah, which begins next Tuesday night, celebrates the victory of Orthodox Judaism over Greek culture, over 2000 years ago. The Greeks sought to obliterate Judaism by banning its practice and by introducing foreign philosophies and ideas into the Jewish nation.

One of the central themes of Chanukah is Teshuva - returning to mitzvah observance. On Chanukah, the Greeks had entered the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and sacrificed pigs and practiced idol worship. When the Jewish freedom fighters regained the Temple, they purified it and rededicated it to the service of Hashem.

Just as Chanukah means rededication, Teshuva also means rededicating to the service of Hashem. Even though a Jew may have ingested pig or worshipped idols, he can always cleanse his system and begin again. Just the Jews back then rededicated the Holy Temple to the service of Hashem, so too can each and every Jew return himself to the service of Hashem. Just as the Sages instituted eight days of candle lighting, feasting and merry making, so too can every individual Jew joyously celebrate his rededication to serving Hashem.

The following inspiring true story illustrates how one very special Jew reached out to others to help them escape the dangers of Greek culture and to return to the service of Hashem...

There are those whose lives are like a star, radiating with a small, constant light. Then there are those whose presence in the world is more like that of a supernova — bursting with pure, brilliant light, but alas, for just a short time. Gavriel Klatzko, known as Rav Gav by his myriad friends and admirers, was such a man. His burning love for his fellow Jews, for Torah, and for life itself, lit up our world for just a few short years. Yet he left an indelible impact on the Jewish community of South Africa, where he served as rabbi of the Sunny Road Shul until his passing in 1999 at the age of 28.

Once, Rav Gav and his friend Yaakov strolled down a city street, engrossed in an animated conversation. So deep in discussion were they that they did not notice the pungent smell of day-old beer and cigarette smoke wafting out to the sidewalk, nor did they notice the hard-eyed bikers and skinheads drifting in and out of the doorway they were passing.

"Anyone can come close to Hashem," Rav Gav was insisting to Yaakov, in an almost comical contrast to the depraved surroundings into which they had wandered.

"Yeah? How about in there?" Yaakov asked jokingly, nodding his head toward the bar. "You're good at outreach. Maybe there are some Jewish bikers in there, and no one will ever reach out to them because they're in the middle of a skinhead bar surrounded by anti-Semites. You could go in and get them to come to a shiur (Torah lesson)!"

Gavriel assessed the line of motorcycles parked along the sidewalk. He sized up burly, chain-wielding men standing outside sharing a flask of whiskey, and he came to a decision. "You know, it's not a bad idea!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "Let's go in and see if there are any Jews."

"I was kidding, Gavriel. We'll get killed in there. These skinheads hate Jews. The Nazis are their heroes! Believe me, there are no Jews in there. These guys wouldn't let them live!"

But Yaakov stopped short. He saw the look in Rav Gav's eyes — a mixture of childlike excitement and steely determination. "You never know until you try," said Rav Gav. He led the way into the dark entrance of the bar, with Yaakov walking close behind — two Jews voluntarily taking a stroll through the lions' den.

The wooden floor was sticky with spilled beer, and the air was sour with smoke, alcohol, and sweat. The loud, raspy voices of men loosened up by a few too many drinks rumbled like an oncoming thunderstorm. Their conversation was mostly in Afrikaans, the Dutch-based language spoken by descendants of the first Dutch settlers of South Africa. Slowly, however, the noise faded and then stopped as dozens of predatory eyes settled upon the hapless men who had just walked through the door.

Two Jews in a biker bar: It was an unusual sight, to be sure, but after a long, tense moment, the bar patrons resumed their drinking and left their guests to wander about, undisturbed for the time being. Did Rav Gav fail to see the hatred on their faces, or was he emboldened by his simple trust in Hashem's protection? In either case, he walked fearlessly over to a table and softly knocked on it. Four men glared up from their shot glasses. They exuded a whiskey aroma that hit Rav Gav's senses like a sudden blast of heat.

"Hi," he said in a friendly voice. "I am a rabbi in Johannesburg and I wanted to find out if anyone here was Jewish." He was answered by a muscular young man whose head was shaved bald. The man's bare arms were so densely tattooed that his tee-shirt appeared to have long sleeves. He slowly scanned Rav Gav from head to toe, as if he had never before seen such a species. "Who do you think you are, coming in here, Rabbi? You better get out of here if you know what's good for you," the man growled.

Rav Gav just shrugged and moved on to the next table, cutting into the men's conversation with another polite little knock on the table and his simple explanation of his mission. If the bar patrons were trying to scare

him with their deadly stares and surly answers, they were failing. Yaakov marveled at his friend's persistence, especially since the mission was turning out to be just as futile as he had expected. But Rav Gav would not leave until he visited every last table.

In the back of the bar, there was just one more group that had not yet been approached. This time, as Rav Gav began to introduce himself, one of the men interrupted him. The group at this table had been watching him with particular interest as he made his rounds.

"Hey Rabbi, you came to the right place," one man told him. "We're all Jewish here. What can we do for you?" It was difficult to believe. There, in the corner of an Afrikaner bar, surrounded by ardent anti-Semites, sat a group of Jewish bikers. In fact, only Jews were allowed to join this particular biker gang. Obviously, however, the other bikers in the bar were not aware that they were sharing their hang-out with a contingent of the Jewish nation.

"Well, I am glad to hear that," said Rav Gav. "Listen, I wanted to let you all know that tomorrow night at 8 o'clock, there will be a free Johnny Walker party at my house, plenty to drink and plenty of fun."

"Really, Rabbi, are you serious?"

"Of course I'm serious. Please come on time and it'll be great!" Rav Gav gave the men his address and left the bar beaming with pleasure. He didn't have to say a word to Yaakov. He had proven that nothing was impossible, given enough nerve.

The next night at around 8:00, Rav Gav and his wife Yocheved waited at the window, wondering if their guests would actually show up. They had set several tables with bottles of Johnny Walker and plenty of food. Now it remained to be seen if the lure would be enough to attract a group of hard-core types to a rabbi's house. Their question was soon answered by the sound of twelve motorcycles ripping down their tranquil residential street. Neighbors rushed outdoors to see what was causing the disturbance. Unfazed, the cyclists parked their bikes in a line in front of the Klatzko home and paraded up the front steps, helmets in hand.

"Thank you all for coming," said Rav Gav as his guests walked awkwardly through the front door. Now it was they who were in alien territory, but their host greeted them with nothing but smiles and one small request: "Please place your weapons on the table and you will get them back when you leave."

As the men unloaded their multitude of pockets, a small mound of guns, knives, and razor blades formed on the table. The newly disarmed guests settled in around the tables set with the copious free scotch their host had provided. Rav Gav poured some scotch into a shot glass and held it up for the group to see. "Guys, this is called a l'chaim," he told them.

As they downed their drinks, Rav Gav circulated among them, gently probing for any slim lines of connections he could establish. On the bikers' part, the evening was already pure heaven; the high imparted by the Johnny Walker was enhanced by the sweet knowledge that it was free and unlimited.

About a half-hour into the evening, Rav Gav saw that the men were relaxed. The combination of the liquor and the warmth of the rabbi's presence had somehow enabled them to let their guard down, much as they had laid down their weapons on the table. Here, they didn't need to defend themselves.

Rav Gav pulled a Chumash from the bookshelf and said with a wry smile, "You know, guys, after all I am a rabbi. I simply must share with you a Jewish thought." He began to give a lesson on the parsha of the week. Thus began the Jewish biker-gang shiur-Torah lesson.

Every week, this unlikely group of talmidim (students) roared up to the Klatzko home for some free Johnny Walker and some great divrei Torah. The shiur went on uninterrupted for almost a year, until the untimely passing of Rav Gav. But the impact of the shiur lives on. Some of these bikers eventually turned their lives around and went to yeshivah in Israel. Some are learning in a kollel today. No one could have imagined that, within the dingy walls of that foreboding biker bar, there were Jewish neshamos (souls) waiting for a lifeline to yank them out of the murky waters. Less likely still was the idea that such people could be motivated to learn Torah. But for Rav Gav, a Jew was a Jew wherever he might be found, and there was no such thing as a Jew who was beyond hope. In his eyes, "You never know until you try." (From Stories for the Jewish Heart II, p.31)

Chanukah is a time of rededication. Every Jew can turn his life around at the blink of an eye. The march of the Holy Jewish nation continues. Many Jews have unfortunately fallen away from the pack and have been absorbed by the nations. There is however still hope for those Jews who are currently in danger of falling away. Chanukah has the power to rekindle even the dimmest Jewish spirit. As long as the flame of the Jewish soul is alit, a Jew can still return to the eternal nation. **Good Shabbos and Happy Chanukah Everyone.**