

Good Shabbos Everyone. As we prepare for Chanukah, let us meditate on one of the central themes of this joyous chag: Nes Gadol Hayah Sham - "a great miracle happened there." Chanukah is the celebration of the victory of the few over the many. On Chanukah we remember that it is the hand of Hashem which caused us to be victorious then. Let us then tell the following amazing true story which illustrates how the hand of Hashem guides the lives of Jews.

Even before war clouds thickened over eastern Europe in the pre-Nazi years, it became common for Jews in the besieged countries -- tired of pogroms, poverty, and despair --to send children to the United States, where opportunities for a better life beckoned.

From the early 1900s on, parents scrimped their rubles to pay for the long and arduous voyage of their sons and daughters, who traveled alone aboard unseaworthy vessels that offered inhuman conditions and an uncertain fate. Since tickets for each treacherous journey cost a small fortune and exacted a heavy toll on the destitute families, parents often chose to ship their children to America one by one rather than sending them all at once.

But it was always their hope and dream that all the children would eventually reach the American haven, where they would be joined later by their parents. In the interim, they would stay with relatives who would care for them and help them wait, sometimes for months or years. And sometimes the longed-for reunions never took place at all. Anya Gold was the chosen one in her family. She was the eldest of eight, and in 1930 her Polish parents told her it was time to go. They had saved just enough money for one ticket, and had decided that Anya would be the first child to leave. They would all soon join her, they said. Growing up in Baltimore under the sheltering wing of an affectionate aunt, Anya waited for her family to arrive. But they never did. It took years for the family to accumulate enough money for another fare, and by then they had been caught in Hitler's web.

In Baltimore, over the years, Anya had received the occasional letter from Poland recounting family news and milestones -- her siblings' bar mitzvahs, their marriages, the births of grandchildren.

She awaited these letters eagerly and savored each one. And then the letters came no more. Anya feared the worst, but it was only after the war that she was able to conclusively determine her family's fate. A few stray survivors from her hometown in Poland who trickled into Baltimore in the late 1940s brought the news she had both known and dreaded to hear: Her entire family had been wiped out. They had all perished in the camps. It was hard to go on afterwards, but even the survivors began to rebuild their lives.

Her family's memory burned in her mind, heart, and soul, but Anya knew that the best way for her to commemorate their legacy was by creating one herself. She would marry and have many children, she vowed. And each would carry one of her siblings' names. Anya did indeed marry a wonderful man named Sol, and their life together was almost idyllic. They were truly soul mates, and their love ran deep. They longed for children -- flesh of their flesh, blood of their blood - - but in this one area, they were thwarted. It was the only thorn in their otherwise perfect union. They were childless.

After many years of trying, of seeking help from specialists the world over, Anya and Sol confronted the reality of their situation. "Would you want to adopt?" Anya asked Sol one day in a tentative voice. Anya had considered this option for a long time, but inwardly she had rebelled. She didn't want to raise someone else's children. She wanted to cradle her own newborn in her arms. She couldn't imagine that she would feel the same way about an adopted child. Still, there seemed no other recourse. They were never going to have children of their own, the doctors had pronounced -- a death knell to their hopes and dreams. Her husband was more certain.

"Yes, let's adopt," he urged. They contacted a Jewish agency in New York and were told that

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In memory of Shusha Malka bas R' Avrohom ob'm

To sponsor a drasha: M. Wolfberg 19 Koritz Way, #212 Spring Valley, New York 10977 (845) 362-3234

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an infant had just been given up for adoption by its teenage mother. They traveled to New York with growing excitement, but when they arrived their hopes were dashed. The flustered agency official stammered an apology.

"I'm so sorry," she said, "but the grandmother has decided to raise the baby, after all." Had their trip to New York been a total waste? "You know," the agency official remarked, "I do have a wonderful little girl named Miriam who is in desperate need of a home." Miriam was adorable and endearing, but she was already eight years old. Although Anya and Sol reluctantly agreed to meet the child, and were captivated by her sweet appeal, they couldn't quite come to terms with her age.

"I really wanted a child young enough to know me as its only mother," Anya explained. "I want a newborn to cradle in my arms." "I understand," the agency official said. "But Miriam has really been through a lot in her short lifetime, and could really use a loving home." "Sorry, but no," Anya said, with regret.

A year passed with no prospects. Anya had contacted many agencies across the United States, but an infant was increasingly difficult to find. All the while, Anya's intense longing for a child consumed her being -- a hungry and hollow ache.

"You know," she mused to her husband one day, "maybe we were too quick to dismiss adopting Miriam. She was really an exceptionally appealing child. Something about her actually tugged at my heartstrings in a special way." Sol looked at her thoughtfully. "It's been a full year," he said. "Do you think she's still available?" She was, the agency official told them over the phone. "Not too many people want a nine-year-old," she explained mournfully, "So, yes, she's still available... "But there's a complication," she added. "Her little brother has been found in Europe and has joined her in our Home for War Orphans. The siblings are inseparable, and we've promised them that they'll be adopted together. Would you consider two?"

Back in New York, Anya and Sol met the siblings and once again, Anya felt drawn to Miriam's sweet demeanor. Her six-year-old brother Moishe was adorable, too. Anya and Sol looked at each other silently, telegraphing their mental agreement. Let's do it!

Back in Baltimore, Anya shepherded the two children across the threshold into their new home, and they glanced at the furnishings with eyes of wonder. Little Moishe was shy and restrained, but Miriam was adventurous and curious, and she moved around the living room excitedly, touching the knickknacks and curios that adorned the mantels and tables. Suddenly, she stopped short in front of the piano and her face went white. She pointed to a photograph. In a tight and strained voice, Miriam asked, "Why do you have a picture of my bubbe (grandmother) on your piano?" "What?" Anya asked, confused. "My babbe. Why is my bubbe's picture on your piano?"

Anya stared at the portrait of her deceased mother. What in heaven's name was the little girl talking about? Miriam ran to the lone piece of luggage she had brought with her from the orphanage.

From a battered pouch, she retrieved a faded photo and brought it to Anya's side. "See," she said, pointing. "I have the same picture, too. My bubbe." "My mother," Anya whispered almost inaudibly. "Do you want to see a picture of my mommy?" Miriam asked. She raced to the luggage to retrieve another photograph. "Do you want to see what she looked like?"

She handed Anya a picture of someone she knew very well. "Sarah!" Anya screamed, as her knees buckled beneath her. "How do you know my mother's name?" the child asked in confusion. Unknowingly, Anya had adopted the two orphaned children of her dead sister, Sarah. They were flesh of her flesh, blood of her blood. They were... her own. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**

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