

Good Shabbos Everyone. Next week we celebrate Chanukah. Chanukah celebrates the victory of traditional Jewish values over the Greek assimilationists about 2200 years ago. It is therefore ironic that Chanukah is perhaps the most often celebrated Jewish holiday among the most assimilated Jews. The reason for this is perhaps the following: Deep down inside every Jew, there is something that we call in Yiddish the "Pintele Yid" the little spark of Jewishness that remains alive, indestructible. When we read the courageous story of Chanukah of how the Maccabees stood up and fought for their Judaism, we are all inspired to do the same.

This week we continue the amazing true story of Shammai Davidovics as told by his daughter Tova Lebovits. The story illustrates how Jews can motivate themselves to defend the faith.

continued from [last week](#). The Jews were safe in Danilev for just one more year. During that time, on his occasional visits, my father tried desperately but in vain to convince his family and townsfolk to flee. He succeeded with but a handful of people, mostly teenagers. The others simply did not believe him. The things he said "will" happen, they argued "could not" happen. And besides, "Where can we run to?!" He offered to get them forged gentile papers, and to help them escape to the forests, providing them with peasants' clothes.

But to no avail. To them, such acts seemed too desperate. They felt they stood a better chance of surviving at home than in the forest. He felt responsible and guilty for his family's death, feeling he should have somehow saved them.

Almost a year later, the Jews of Danilev were again herded, and this time deported and murdered. This time my father arrived several days too late. There was nothing he could do by then. He was only able to reach one sister in time.

Until his dying day, my father felt responsible and guilty for his family's death. He believed he should have been able to get through to them and somehow save them.

When the Nazis occupied Budapest, they made an agreement with the Hungarian authorities, whereby the Hungarians would recruit a special police Hungarian force -- called the Kishket -- that would be in charge of taking care of buildings which the Germans gave political immunity to, such as the Austrian Embassy.

My father and several of his Jewish friends joined this force (as gentiles, of course, since Jews were not allowed). This way, they created an underground that could gather information about enemy activities. (Years ago, Yad Vashem had a life-size portrait of my father in his Hungarian Kishket uniform, as an example of Jewish underground activity.)

By then, Jewish citizenship papers were no longer good enough. My father obtained for my mother and her entire family gentile papers, and later when that became too dangerous, he hid them in an attic. He brought them food and provisions until the remainder of the war.

One day my mother came running tearfully to my father. Her mother (my grandma Cidi) and her uncle (Cidi's brother) had become careless and gone out of hiding for a bit. They were caught by German soldiers and taken to a concentration camp. My father must help. He assumed the identity of the Austrian counsel for 24 hours, and entered the concentration camp. My father found out exactly where they were detained, and with the help of his friends, organized an escape.

He found out that the Austrian counsel (the Austrian representative in Hungary at the time) was leaving the capitol for a few days. My father assumed the identity of the Austrian counsel for 24 hours. He had friends in a Kishket police car wait outside the camp for him.

The "Austrian counsel" entered the concentration camp. He approached the officer in charge and with perfect Austrian German introduced himself. He was also in charge of the Swiss in Budapest, and said it had come to his attention that through some terrible error, two Swiss citizens had been wrongfully deported and now detained in this very camp. He held their papers in his hand.

The officer in charge said that was impossible, but my father insisted on checking it out, for he had personally promised their relatives he would attend to the matter. So together they went from floor to floor searching for these citizens.

On each floor, they announced the names of these citizens. And so they found my grandmother

and her brother. They took them out, into the waiting police car, sped away, back into hiding. My father sadly recalled as he walked through the camp, how many Jews begged and pleaded with him: "We too are Swiss citizens. We too are Austrian citizens. Help us." But he could do nothing for those unfortunate people, and he said he would never forget them.

One time in Israel some time after the war, my brother Shmuel got on a public bus with my father. The driver took a look at my father, became very emotional, got up, hugged him hard, and began weeping and crying my father's name, "Shammai, Shammai." He refused to take payment, sat my father in the front seat, and as he drove began telling his tale to the astonished riders. This bus driver told how my father -- disguised as a priest -- came and rescued a young chassidic boy, himself.

Apparently, my father's priestly disguise had become almost his second identity. It enabled him to travel from village to village for weeks at a time on, even entering concentration camps and thus saving lives.

How did this disguise come about? While attending university, he was required to remain in class during Christian prayers and theology classes. He learned his lessons well and was also fluent in Latin. This oddity later saved his life many times, and helped save others. Hashem works in mysterious ways.

My father used his black graduation robe from rabbinical seminary as his priestly garb. He became a traveling priest, the kind that kept a special pouch with various relics and talisman, holy to the Christians and especially the peasants, and he knew how to perform the various rituals. He always had two "altar boys" to assist him, and he would pick them up here and there where he would find lost Jewish children. He would dress them in gentile clothes and teach them their prayers and duties, and they would travel together until he found a way out for them. This particular bus driver was one of those he'd smuggled out of hell to Israel.

One day, while my father was living with me in Jerusalem, someone called and asked if Dr. Davidovics was there. When I replied, "Yes," he insisted on coming over with his wife and son. They had just flown in from Hungary and when he entered our home, he ran excitedly to my ailing father, got on his knees and kissed his hands. My father's eyes became red, as they do when he cries tearlessly -- the closest he ever got to crying.

Years earlier, my father had found this orphaned boy, neglected and frightened on the street. He took him in, washed him, fed him, dressed him, and got him new gentile identity papers. Then he took him to a Christian orphanage where he was cared for by nuns. My father told him: "Do as you are told, but never forget who you are. One day you will again live as a Jew." And so it was. They regularly keep in touch and send us cards several times a year. He was thrown onto a pile of other bodies, but through some miracle he crawled away and lived.

Ironically, it was this priestly disguise that had almost left my father for dead. On one of his many trips to the concentration camps, as he forced himself to walk quickly past the human skeletons that were his people, he was seen by a neighbor from Danilev. The man was so overcome with joy that he yelled out, "Shammai! Shammai!" My father tried desperately to signal to him to stop, but it was too late.

My father was taken, and now he too became an inmate. He was tortured and beaten and finally left for dead. His body was thrown onto a pile of other bodies, but through some miracle he crawled away from that hell and lived. He had marks all over his legs for the rest of his life, and sometimes he would get headaches where they had beaten him. But he never complained about anything.

My father had done all he could to reverse the evil. For his family, his townsfolk, and the 6 million Jews, it was not enough. We shall never forget."

Good Shabbos.