

Good Shabbos Everyone. In our portion this week Vayikra, the Torah describes the various korbanos - sacrifices which were brought in the tabernacle and later in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The root of the word korban - (sacrifice) is karov which means close. The essence of the korbanos was that they brought Jews closer to Hashem. The korbanos are sacrifices for Hashem. Our lesson this week is therefore the following: Whenever we make sacrifices for Hashem, we grow closer to Hashem and His Holiness. The following amazing and touching true story illustrates how a few Jews grew closer to Hashem.

About ten years ago a young rabbi was invited to a town in the former Soviet Union to arrange and conduct a Passover Seder for the area residents.

The recently ordained Rabbi arrived several weeks before the holiday to prepare. Trying to make the event as big as possible, he went to the town's mayor to find a suitable place to hold the festive ceremony. After exploring several options, the Mayor decided that the best place in town to serve their purpose was the Communist meeting hall.

When the Communists were in power, their party hall was usually the biggest building. The Rabbi and the Mayor went to look at the place, and sure enough, it was perfect. Publicity and posters went up, people were invited, and food was brought and prepared. New vessels were bought, the Pesach cooking was supervised, and the whole building was cleaned and decorated with Pesach themes.

All the hard work paid off. Three hundred people arrived for the Seder! Young and old, men and women came, all dressed in their nicest clothes with shining faces. Some came from nostalgia, some out of curiosity, and some to enjoy a good meal. But everyone, whether they knew it or not, came because they were Jews and tonight was Pesach. It took a while to get everyone seated and settled.

The Rabbi made a short welcoming speech telling them what to expect. For some of them it was their first "Seder" in fifty years, and for many the first in their lives. Haggadahs translated into Russian were handed out, cups were filled with wine, Matzos were distributed, and the evening began. Everyone followed the Rabbi's instructions, and listened to his explanations with great interest. They read aloud from their books how Hashem performed great miracles thousands of years ago, and how He took the Jews out of Egypt. They ate the Matza, drank four cups of wine, finished their holiday meal, sang, and even danced at certain times. All went smoothly until the cup of Elijah. Rabbi explained that this fifth cup represents the future Redemption, when Moshiach will gather all Jews and make a beautiful new world with the revelation of Hashem everywhere.

Suddenly one of the older men stood up, banged on the table and said in a booming voice, "Young man! Excuse me please, young Rabbi!" The place fell silent. As they listened earlier to the Rabbi, they now turned to the impromptu speaker. "We are very grateful to you for this beautiful evening with the wonderful food and wine you brought us. Everything is very nice, very beautiful and very tasty." Everyone in the room shook their heads in agreement and wondered what he was getting at. "Everything you said is also very interesting and nice." The man continued. "Beautiful stories; about miracles... nice Bible stories. We all love stories. But what you said about Messiah coming and making a utopia, building a Holy Temple and all this. Please Rabbi, we are grown up people. We are not little children to believe such nonsense! You are a very nice man and we are very grateful, but please save such foolish superstitions for your children, not for intelligent grown-ups. Please understand, dear Rabbi, this is nothing personal but you are naive. You are locked up in Yeshiva and we live out here in the real world."

Many of the assembled shook their heads in agreement. They looked pitifully at the Rabbi as though to say, "We are sorry, but he's right."

The young rabbi however did not lose his composure. He waited a minute and replied. "My friend," he said with a warm smile, "My friends!" he opened his arms and looked around the room. "Do you realize where we are? Do you realize what we are doing? Do you realize what you are saying!? If someone would have told you fifteen years ago that you would celebrate a PESACH SEDER in the COMMUNIST MEETING HALL, would you ever have believe him? Fifteen years ago there was nothing more powerful than Communism, and nothing weaker than Judaism! Communism was the chief antagonist and enemy of Hashem, everyone in Russia was sure that Communism was right, and would win in the end. Yet here we are! The impossible has happened! Communism has not only fallen, its hall now serves Judaism! Is it really so far-fetched that Moshiach can change the world?" The man looked at the crowd then back at the young rabbi, straightened up, smiled broadly and said..."BRAVO!!" And the crowd broke into applause. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**