

**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 two people grew closer to Hashem.

"It happened over ten years ago," recalled Rav Moshe Friedman of Rechasim, Israel. "The Rabbanim of my town chose me to accompany a sick person of our community who was traveling to the Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in Washington Heights, New York, for delicate brain surgery. For various reasons, no family member was able to accompany him, so I went instead." Rav Friedman continued.

"For the next twenty-four hours," the doctor sternly warned me on the erev Shabbos before the surgery, "this patient may not so much as move a muscle. If he does, he may suffer internal injuries that could prove to be fatal. Watch him well!"

I had been invited to eat the Shabbos meals with a family that lived close to the hospital. When I heard these dire words of caution, I immediately abandoned the idea and prepared to spend Shabbos in the hospital, keeping watch over this critically-ill young man.

"Chaim," I whispered to my friend, "Did you hear the doctor's orders? Do not move a muscle! But don't worry, I'm staying right here with you. If you need something, tell me, and I'll bring it." Moving was forbidden but talking was permitted.

The Shabbos Queen made her regal entry even within the somber hospital walls, bringing along with her the calming peace and serenity of Shabbos. I davened Mincha (the afternoon prayers) and sang Lecha Dodi. When night fell, I davened Ma'ariv (the evening prayers) — trying to invoke a warm, and meaningful prayer there, a lonely Jew among hundreds of non-Jews.

We sang Shalom Aleichem and Aishes Chayil, thinking about our families who were spending Shabbos without us so many thousands of miles away. Then I poured the grape juice and began reciting Kiddush. When I was only halfway through, two muscular orderlies wearing white coats entered the room. Without a word, they handed me a doctor's letter stating that the patient had to be taken downstairs for further x-rays.

"What?" I asked incredulously, "He can't be moved! The doctor said one move could be fatal... It just can't be..." Without further ado, they lifted Chaim the helpless patient, placed him on a stretcher and wheeled him out of room. We took an elevator down to the 2nd floor basement to take x-rays. Because Chaim was very ill, I was allowed to accompany him on the elevator, which was operated by non-Jews.

Once downstairs, I noticed an older woman who lay alone, waiting for her turn to take x-rays. I was overcome with pity for this lone woman, who seemed to be suffering greatly. Catching my sympathetic glance, she lifted her wrinkled hand and beckoned to me. I came towards her and saw her lips moving in a whisper. I bent my head down to hear better. All she said was two words: "Gut Shabbos." I looked at her in surprise.

So this woman was Jewish! "Gut Shabbos!" I replied warmly. "May you feel better soon! May the Shabbos bring along a recovery for you." I turned to my friend and said, "Chaim!" I said, "Guess what? We have a fellow Jew here. This woman is Jewish, and she even speaks Yiddish." This was our first encounter with a Jewish face and Yiddish words in Presbyterian General, and we were both excited.

"R. Moshe," said Chaim, sharing my enthusiasm, "go to our room and bring down a cup and some grape juice. Make Kiddush for her — I'm sure she has not heard Kiddush yet."

"Go up to our room?" I repeated. "Chaim, just think. We're on floor minus two and our room is on the seventeenth floor. There are no stairs reaching the upper floors of this building. How do you expect me to get there?"

But Chaim would not be swayed, "R. Moshe, you could use the fire escape," he insisted, "Please get the grape juice and make Kiddush for her; she's a Jewish woman!" I had no choice. I know it wasn't advisable to upset Chaim in his condition — it could affect his already teetering blood pressure. It was obvious that I would have to comply with his wishes. I left the waiting room and ascended the two flights to the ground floor. I was about to leave the building when I encountered a new problem. The lobby doors were electronically operated. I stood at the side, waiting for a non-Jew to pass through and activate the doors.

When someone finally entered the building, I zoomed past, not wanting to cause the electric doors to slay open for even an extra second. The people in the lobby probably had a good laugh. After all, they had seen a crazy fellow waiting patiently for several minutes at the doors and then suddenly scooting through them as if someone were at his heels. I looked upwards from the base of the fire escape, trying to make out the seventeenth floor, but all I saw was a cloudy gray sky. I took a deep breath and began my trek. It was a typical New York winter. The cold penetrated my bones and the biting wind took my breath away. Upwards I marched, up and up, on and on, until, to my immense relief, I saw the number 17 smiling at me in a friendly, bright fluorescent yellow. My trials were not yet over. To my dismay, I realized that there was no handle on the door. The door could only be opened from inside. There was a small bell affixed on the brick wall, helpfully designed to call someone to open the door. But on Shabbos the bell was useless to me. "Ribbono Shel Olam," I cried out in despair, "I'm cold and exhausted from this strenuous climb. What do I do now? Go back down again? What will I tell Chaim?" My prayers were answered. The door was suddenly pushed open — someone must have mistaken it for a different door. The unsuspecting man was frightened out of his wits when I darted past him. I fell into the nearest chair, took a couple of deep breaths and rubbed my hands together, trying to warm myself up a little. Then I took the grape juice and a few cups and headed back to the fire escape, back to my waiting friend and the elderly Jewish woman. The descent was far easier than the way up. When I reached the ground floor, I had only a short wait until the automatic doors opened for a non-Jew. Since there a fence around the hospital, there was no problem to carry in the area around the hospital.

Once in the main building, my halachic difficulties were over. I easily descended the two flights of stairs to the waiting room, and approached the woman. Speaking in Yiddish, I told her, "I've come to make Kiddush for you." The woman threw me a look of gratitude. She listened closely while I recited Kiddush and then said in as loud a voice as she could muster, "Amen." I would never have expected to hear such a hearty Amen from this sickly, emaciated woman. I gave her a drop of grape juice and then bent down once again to listen to what she was trying to tell me. "Fifty years have gone by since I heard Kiddush last," she said in a feeble voice. Using her last reserves of energy, she told me that she was born in Poland and that she had spent the war years hiding among gentiles. After the war she emigrated to America. She did not elaborate on what happened to her after that. She only repeated, as if in a trance, "It's been fifty years since I last answered Amen." I was overcome with emotion. What a zechus – merit it was for me that I could make Kiddush for this woman and give her the chance of saying Amen after fifty years. I was even further moved an hour later when I discovered that the woman had passed away... "Master of the Universe," I thought to myself, "I've traveled seven thousand miles in order to elicit a hearty Amen, her first in fifty years... the key she needed to open the gates of Paradise." Indeed, our Sages say "One who answers Amen with all his strength, the gates of Paradise are opened for him." (Shabbos 119b) (Heard from R. Moshe Friedman, Rechasim) We can be inspired by this story to make every effort to say "amen" to other people's brachas - blessings. In fact, the Sages tell us that answering amen is even more meritorious than saying the bracha itself. One should also endeavor to say blessings loudly, so that others may answer amen. One who says a blessing quietly is compared to a thief, because he denies others the mitzvah of answering amen! **Goods Shabbos Everyone.**