

Good Shabbos and Happy Chanukah Everyone. We begin this week with a short story, which is related to Chanukah. Several years ago, there was a certain attorney in Los Angeles who had a case involving Greek speaking people. In order to facilitate communication with the Greek speakers, the attorney contacted a local university and contracted with them to provide for a Greek speaker to serve as an interpreter.

On the appointed day, the interpreter arrived at the attorney's office. However, there was one glitch. The interpreter knew only ancient Greek, yet the Clients spoke modern Greek, two languages which are so different that the services of the interpreter were useless! What does this story have to do with Chanukah?

The ancient Greeks are all but a few chapters in the history books. Nobody speaks the ancient Greek language, their religion is mythology, and the foods and customs of Modern Greece are for the most part totally different than they were 2000 years ago. We Jews however continue today with the same Shabbos, the same Bris Milah, basically the same customs and the same language we have always had. We have truly prevailed over the Greeks!

Before we proceed to our amazing story this week, let us preface our remarks with a brief retelling of the account of Chanukah: About 2169 years ago, the Syrian Greeks who ruled Eretz Yisroel, tried to force the Jews to abandon their customs and to accept upon themselves Greek customs and the Greek value system. The Jews, led by Matisyahu ben Yochanan, the Cohen Gadol, fought back and were victorious with the help of Hashem. Today we celebrate Chanukah as the victory of Judaism over assimilation.

One of the most important Jewish values is the mitzvah of welcoming guests into our homes. Welcoming guests into our homes epitomizes Jewish values. Therefore it is especially important that we welcome guests into our homes on Chanukah, a yom tov which celebrates the victory of Jewish values over foreign values.

The following amazing and creepy true story illustrates the power of the mitzvah of welcoming guests into our homes. It was the first night of Chanukah and Rabbi Haber with his wife at his side, was about to light the menorah. The Habers, who lived in the Unsdorf section of Jerusalem, were delighted to begin their married life in Eretz Yisroel. R' Yaakov was studying at Yeshiva Torah Ore, where he enjoyed a close relationship with the Rush Yeshivah, Rabbi Chaim Pinchus Scheinberg.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the front door. The Habers were not expecting anyone and their surprise turned to astonishment when they opened the door and saw a bedraggled, disheveled middle-aged man. His hat was turned askew, his clothes were filthy and his face unshaven. His right eye seemed locked shut, making him look like a pirate who misplaced his eye patch. "Do you think you might have a meal for me?" he asked politely. The Habers looked at each other and then back at the poor visitor. It was Chanukah, Hashem had blessed them with much good, and they could only imagine how lonely the fellow must feel. He didn't look dangerous, just sad. Why not share their bounty with others? "Yes, come in," said Rabbi Haber. "We're going to eat after I light the menorah. Please join us."

The man tried to smile but his effort failed. He seemed to grimace as he thanked them softly. As he walked past the Habers into the dining area, they could smell the stench of his clothes that probably hadn't been washed in weeks. They would not go back on their word. He could stay for the meal and they would endure it. He said his name was Beinish* and he seemed pleasant though he didn't talk much about his personal life. He did mention that he lived alone and that he had fallen on hard times.

The meal went by uneventfully as Rabbi Haber discussed some spiritual aspects of the festival. However before Beinish left, he asked the Habers if he could come back again. They assured him he could.

Over the next few weeks Beinish began coming with increased frequency and soon the Habers found themselves hosting him on Shabbos and a few times in the middle of the week. Mrs. Haber didn't mind washing the soiled clothes that Beinish would bring her every few days, but when he started coming in mid-afternoons while R' Yaakov was in the yeshivah, it became uncomfortable. The Habers hinted to Beinish that it was better that he come in the evening, but he said that it was often hard for him to do so. He came and went as he pleased.

The Habers were scheduled to move to the Romemah neighborhood, where apartments were more affordable. They wondered if they were obligated to tell Beinish when and where they were moving. Rabbi Haber asked a she'eileh (religious ruling) and was told that he need not reveal his new address or even tell Beinish that he was moving, so they moved to Romemah and didn't hear from Beinish again.

The Habers settled in their new quarters and had their first child. A few weeks later. Rabbi Haber noticed a scorpion sprinting across his dining room floor. He caught up with it and made sure it would never come back.

There are 1,300 species of scorpions worldwide, and some of the most dangerous are in the Middle East. There is only one species in the Unites States and there are almost twenty other species worldwide which have venom potent enough to be dangerous to humans. Eretz Yisroel is home to the most deadly of all scorpions, the Palestine yellow scorpion, whose sting can be fatal to children. Rabbi Haber wasn't taking any chances.

A few days later a number of scorpions scooted across the floor. Rabbi and Mrs. Haber were frightened.

Scorpions could be lethal. Soon scorpions came every day, so the Habers placed blankets over their infant's crib to prevent them from crawling in. They called an exterminator, who made two visits, but eventually he announced, "There is nothing more I can do here." The Habers were devastated. If the exterminator couldn't eliminate the scorpions, how could they?

The strange thing was that no one else on the block had this problem. The final straw came one Shabbos morning. Rabbi Haber awoke to his wife's screams. She was standing on a chair pointing to a corner of the room where scorpions ran alongside the baseboard. Rabbi Haber hurried to get his Mishnah Berurah, for he knew that one may not kill a scorpion or any other insect on Shabbos, unless one is positive that it is one of the life-threatening species. Rabbi Haber jumped atop another chair, scanning the Mishnah Berurah (Orach Chaim 316:10)(a book of Halacha, Jewish Law), desperately trying to decide which kind of scorpion he was permitted to kill and which he would have to leave scampering around to its delight.

After that harrowing Shabbos, Rabbi Haber went to see his Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Scheinberg. "Rebbi," he began, "my wife and I have been going through this terrible experience with scorpions roaming our apartment. It is frightening and dangerous. Have we done anything wrong? How should I view this spiritually? Why is this happening?"

Rabbi Scheinberg is a world famous posek (halachic authority) and Rosh Yeshivah to thousands of talmidim in Eretz Yisroel and the United States. In the years that Rabbi Haber had studied under Rabbi Scheinberg and in the decades since then, never had he heard his Rosh Yeshivah base a halachic decision or practical advice from the source he quoted. "Let's take a look at Perek Shirah," said Rabbi Scheinberg.

The theme of the six chapters of Perek Shirah is that everything in Creation has a role to play in Hashem's plan. To illustrate what that role is, Perek Shirah assigns a verse from Tanach to every being in the world, from huge mountains to tiny ants. The sefer is very ancient. Some say it was composed by Dovid HaMelech, some say by Shlomo HaMelech, and some say by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi. (It is first mentioned in Yalkut Shimoni, Parashas Bo 187:11. For an in-depth commentary and historical background of Perek Shirah see Rabbi Nosson Slifkin's Nature's Song.)

Rabbi Scheinberg took out a sefer that had Perek Shirah and turned to Chapter Six, which contains the "songs" of creeping creatures, such as the snake, snail and ant. He pointed to the entry on scorpions. [The scorpion says:] "G-d is good to all, and His mercy is upon all His handiwork." (Tehillim 145:9).

Rabbi Scheinberg turned to Rabbi Haber and said, "We don't know the purpose of scorpions in this world. Even though some of them are lethal, the Ribono Shel Olam has compassion on scorpions and supplies them with food and with what they need to survive. Perhaps you failed to show compassion to someone. The scorpions song is one of rachmanus (mercy) and that's what we must adapt in our lives."

Rabbi Haber was stunned! Suddenly the picture was becoming clear. In a sense he had abandoned Beinish, the poor man who had been relying on him and his wife. As he left Rabbi Scheinberg, he knew he had to find Beinish somehow, somewhere.

One day as he was on a bus, Rabbi Haber spotted Beinish. He quickly got off the bus and ran over to the destitute man who seemed to be walking aimlessly. "Reb Beinish, we miss you and we need you! When can you come again?" Beinish smiled and said, "I miss you, too. Tell me when and where I should come."

Rabbi Haber gave Beinish his new Romemah address, and that night Beinish came for supper. That was just the start; once again he began coming regularly. Beinish was the Haber's frequent guest, but the scorpions were gone. Not one returned! This went on until the Habers moved from Eretz Yisroel as Rabbi Haber accepted his first rabbinical position in his hometown of Buffalo, New York. (From "Reflections of the Maggid" Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn)

During the coming days of Chanukah, we should all make a special effort to welcome guests into our homes. That way we will show that Jewish values have truly won out over Greek values. **Good Shabbos and a Happy Chanukah Everyone.**