

The Jewish Weekly

Celebrating Pesach in A Siberia Labor Camp

In 1939, the German military began to attack Poland. When all of Poland fell to the Germans, the Jews knew it was time to take steps to escape from the destruction. Russia was no lover of the Jews, but many instinctively felt that anything was preferable to the Germans. So, along with many others, HaRav Yisrael Rabinowitz packed his belongings and began to plan his escape to Russia.

Rabbi Yisrael and his group cautiously approached the border, following in the footsteps of their barely visible guide. And then...disaster! Shouts and gunfire rang through the night as the border guards tried to stop the illegal refugees.

Rabbi Yisrael ran desperately, zigzagging back and forth to avoid the bullets that were flying through the air. But eventually he tripped and fell, and the Russian guards were on top of him.

Based on trumped-up charges, the evil Soviets sentenced Rabbi Yisrael to five years of hard labor in Siberia. Despite the difficulties, Rabbi Yisrael was determined not to give an inch in his observance of Torah and mitzvot. He avoided treif (non-kosher) food at all costs. He refused to work on Shabbat, despite many beatings and punishments.

After some time, though, the guards realized that he was adamant in refusing to violate his religious principles, and they left him alone.

Other Jews in the area were greatly heartened by the presence and moral strength of Rabbi Yisrael. The word quickly got around. For the many Jews imprisoned in the wasteland of Siberia, he became the source of halachic (Jewish legal) advice and much needed encouragement.

Passover was several weeks away, and Rabbi Yisrael began making plans for a chametz-free Pesach. He never touched the non-kosher soup; he lived solely on his bread ration. What could replace it for Pesach?

Finally, he succeeded to make contact with a woman living near the camp, who was willing to trade bread for other kinds of food. Now he had to find a way to get to the woman to make the exchange.

An idea began to form in his mind. He would eat only half his bread ration during the next few weeks, saving the other half to trade in return for potatoes. Then, shortly before Pesach, he would fake illness, thereby gaining access to the prison hospital, where security was lax. In the middle of the night, he would leave the hospital to make the trade.

The first difficulty was in saving half of the meager bread ration. The entire ration itself was hardly enough to live on, and on the reduced ration, he started to feel weak from hunger. Still, the thought of the upcoming Yom Tov strengthened him and made it all worthwhile.

Shortly before Pesach, Rabbi Yisrael managed to procure a grass that causes stomach illness. They readily admitted him to the hospital, where shortly thereafter they confiscated his fur coat. After all, they reasoned, bedridden patients had no need for fur coats.

This complicated his plan immensely; going out in the Siberian night without a coat was not very advisable. But he had come this far, and he was determined to go ahead with his plan.

Long after the other patients were asleep, Rabbi Yisrael slipped out of bed and climbed out of the nearest window. The freezing wind instantly knifed through his thin nightclothes, and he started shivering uncontrollably. Moving quickly to keep warm, he dashed to the hiding place where he kept his extra bread, grabbed the food, and raced to meet the woman.

As soon as he reached his destination, Rabbi Yisrael realized that he had to be back at the hospital before the nurses came around and discovered him missing. So he made the exchange quickly, thanked the woman politely, and dashed out toward the hospital.

The way back somehow seemed to take much longer. Every step was an effort as the frigid wind snatched away his breath and froze his body. Somehow he reached the hospital.

He slipped in the window and back into bed, half frozen, yet with nobody realizing his absence. When Pesach arrived, the satisfaction of being able to observe the Yom Tov in accordance with halacha (Jewish law) made the outing at night well worthwhile.

After Pesach, spring finally came to Siberia. As spring turned to summer, Rabbi Yisrael began thinking about Tisha b'Av. Should he fast in his weakened state? Rabbi Yisrael

It Once Happened...

decided to fast and share in the sorrow of his Creator over the destruction of the Holy Temple.

His friends heard about his plans, and they tried to convince him not to fast. Still, Rabbi Yisrael remained firm. So they decided to help him out as much as they could.

One of the women cooked him a soup to eat after the fast. As soon as he ate the soup, Rabbi Yisrael suffered from unbearable stomach pains, and he was taken to the hospital. As he was dozing off, he suddenly realized that this was the second time he had been in the hospital for stomach pains. The first time, of course, he caused the stomach pains himself, to get into the infirmary to be able to observe Pesach.

Shouts and cheers awakened Rabbi Yisrael the following morning. "We are free! We are free!" The other patients were dancing wildly around the room, laughing and crying simultaneously.

"What is all this about?" Rabbi Yisrael asked in surprise.


"Reb Yisrael, we are free!" they cried with excitement. "Stalin made a pact with the Polish government in exile, allowing all the political prisoners of Polish nationalities who are in hospitals to be set free. And that means that we are free to go!"

Rabbi Yisrael immediately offered a heartfelt prayer to the One Above. Clearly, his being in the hospital at this opportune moment was a result of his mesiras nefesh (self-sacrifice) in observing the laws of Pesach. The hand of G-d in his life was so evident, it was amazing!


Rabbi Yisrael Rabinowitz was sent to Tashkent, where he soon began teaching children. After the war, he came to America, where he continued his mission in life: teaching Torah to all. He served as a rabbinical consultant in the Bronx, and as the rabbi of the Kehillas Ohel Moshe synagogue there on Wallace Avenue. He also authored two volumes of "Kol Bo" on the Shulchan Aruch ('Code of Jewish Law')

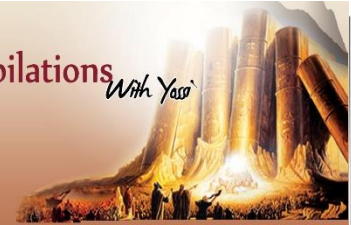
As we celebrate the Passover festival, we remember the incredible story of Rabbi Yisrael Rabinowitz, how he made the service of G-d Al-Mighty a top priority.

Reprinted from an email of An Anthology of Stories Emailed for Passover (2009 - 2015) by Daniel Kerren..



Shabbat Times - Parshat Shemini

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
 Jerusalem	6:29	7:43	8:23
Tel Aviv	6:44	7:45	8:20
Haifa	6:36	7:45	8:22
Be'er Sheva	6:46	7:45	8:22



Invading Syria Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles

In the 1970s, Mr. Nash Kestenbaum was President of the National Council of Young Israel, and as such, he had extensive dealings with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, for Jewish outreach was very important to him. However, since, according to him, outreach was not Young Israel's main objective, he felt that it was better to channel it through Chabad. He gave a lot of support to Chabad and the Rebbe in this regard.

The Rebbe sent him off on various assignments. Often he drove off to Albany, the capital city of New York State, and the seat of its government, on a mission for the Rebbe. When he came back, he and the Rebbe would meet for hours.

He also arranged funding for Lubavitch efforts in Central and South America and, at the behest of the Rebbe, he opened a chain of kosher kitchens on college campuses under the Young Israel name.

At first, Kestenbaum didn't want to do it. He said he had enough on his plate already. But the Rebbe kept nudging him. After a certain point, the Rebbe presented him with a list of thirteen campuses and said, "I've made all the arrangements myself. Everything is taken care of. I've spoken to all the deans, and everything is in place for the kosher kitchens to open up. We have the locations for you on campus; we have cooks. All we now need is the Young Israel name and Young Israel funding."

Hearing that, Kestenbaum agreed. He said, "I don't really want to do this because such activities are not a Young Israel priority, but if the Rebbe himself went out and made all the arrangements, how can I say no?"

Even Chabad people in those cities did not know that these kitchens had been opened at the behest of the Rebbe, and as a result, there was cooperation between the two organizations.

His son David revealed: "My father could never say no to the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Once, he was doing an appeal for the Hebrew Academy of Long Beach, and he brought me along. I was surprised that, in the middle of his speech, he started talking about Taharat Hamishpacha - the Jewish Laws of Family Purity - and the importance of having children.

"Afterwards, I asked him, 'Why are you doing this? You're supposed to be fundraising for the Hebrew Academy of Long Beach.'

"He said that the Rebbe and Rav Y. Soloveitchik both asked him to go on a campaign across North America convincing people to keep Taharat Hamishpacha and to have children, because the Jewish people needed the next generation."

In truth, Nash Kestenbaum had many lengthy meetings with the Rebbe relating to this and to other assignments the Rebbe gave him, but he kept all that private. Even when people asked him, "Why were you with the Rebbe for so long? What did the Rebbe say to you?" he wouldn't

say anything. His opinion was that you can never accurately tell over what a great Torah sage said.

But there is one story that he did tell, and it is a remarkable story.

In 1973, while Mr. Nash Kestenbaum was leading Yom Kippur prayers in his synagogue, the Young Israel of Long Beach, he was interrupted by an urgent message: Israel had been attacked and was at war, and that he was needed immediately in Washington.

He stopped the prayers and the local police rushed him to Long Beach Memorial Hospital where a helicopter was waiting on the roof, ready to take him to the Kennedy Airport for a flight to Washington.

Once he arrived there, he met with President Nixon's Chief of Staff, with a number of generals and whoever else was necessary. His task was to arrange an airlift of weapons and military equipment to Israel that very day.

After he had accomplished what he had been asked to do by Golda Meir, who was Prime Minister of Israel at the time, my father called various Jewish leaders, including the Rebbe, to inform them what was going on. He told them how badly the first day of the war went, that Israel was in danger of losing the war, and about the airlift that had been arranged.

Hearing this, the Rebbe said to him, "Don't worry, everything is going to be fine. They are going to march on to Damascus."

He responded that he didn't think this was likely, considering the terrible casualties that Israel had suffered in the first day of the war. In fact, my father said, the country was in danger of being overrun - the situation was dire.

But the Lubavitcher Rebbe insisted, "They are not going to be overrun. They're going to be so successful; they're going to march on to Damascus."

So Kestenbaum took the Rebbe at his word, and he was relieved that all would end well and thrilled that the Israeli army would win and even march on to Damascus.

When it was over, he called the Rebbe again and said to him, "Nu, what happened? They stopped forty kilometers away from Damascus; they didn't march on to there at all."

In response, the Rebbe became very upset. He said, "Is it my fault that Henry Kissinger intervened and stopped them from going forward?" (Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State [i. e. Foreign Affairs] in the Nixon administration.) "Had it not been for him, they would have been able to march on to Damascus."

Can you imagine if they had taken Damascus, the trump card that they would have had for negotiations? There would have been peace forever...."

Reprinted from an email from KabbalaOnline.org.

We discover in Parshat Shemini, a surprising ingredient for outstanding leadership.

Aaron had been appointed as the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest of the nation. And now, the moment came for him to offer his opening sacrifice, and yet Moshe needed to say to Aharon, "קרב אל המזבח - Approach the altar."

Rashi on Vayikra 9:7 explains that Moshe was saying to Aaron, "למה אתה בוש? לך נבחרת" - Why are you withdrawing yourself? It is for this that you were chosen."

The Baal Shem Tov gives a beautiful commentary here. He says that Aharon was filled with humility and that's why he would have preferred that somebody else would have taken on this role, in the same way as he loved the fact that his younger brother Moshe became the leader of the nation. Moshe, therefore, said to his brother Aaron, "לך נבחרת" - It's on account of your humility that you are becoming the Kohen Gadol."

The Talmud Yerushalmi tells us a fascinating story about the people of Simonia in the northern Galilee. They approached Rebbe Yehuda HaNasi in the third century and they explained that they were an important community, and asked if he could please provide an outstanding rabbi for them. Rebbe Yehuda HaNasi said, "I've got just the right person for you. His name is Levi Bar Sisi."

Levi bar Sisi arrived in Simonia. They created a large bimah, a platform, upon which they seated him on a throne. The people came and they fired questions at him - questions in Halacha, questions in Tanach - and he was stunned. He didn't know how to answer a single question! The people went back to Rebbe Yehuda HaNasi and said, "The man you sent us - he's a fake! He's a dud! What happened?"

Rebbe Yehuda HaNasi said, "But at the very least, he's as great as I am!" Indeed, we know that Levi bar Sisi assisted Rebbe Yehuda HaNasi in compiling the Mishnah! So Rebbe Yehuda HaNasi turned to Levi bar Sisi and asked him what had happened.

"Well," said Levi bar Sisi, "They made a king out of me, it went to my head and I forgot everything!"

The Talmud here wants us to know that sometimes arrogance can be an impediment to outstanding leadership. Rather we should have the qualities of Aaron the High Priest, who was filled with humility.

Indeed, sometimes we notice how a person who promotes himself or herself, somebody who's arrogant, can end up attaining a position of power, authority, and leadership. Actually from the Torah, we learn that the most outstanding ingredient for great leadership is the humility of Aharon the High Priest.

So with this humility let us ask that Hashem bless and watch over our people with peace, no more fighting, no more issues, not to suffer great tragedies as we have in the past. So let us join together to pray with all our hearts for all those who are sick, as well as praying for our soldiers who go out to protect us and those who need healing, shidduchim, children and parnassah and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual, sweet and happy Shabbat, and Chodesh Tov.

Yossi

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 17
MITZVOT ASEH: 6
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 11

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 91
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1238
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 4670

HAFTORA:
Ashkenazim: Shmuel II, 6:1 - 7:17
Chabad & Sephardim: Shmuel II, 6:1 - 19

Shabbat Mevarchim Chodesh Iyar which falls on Friday and Shabbat, April 17 & 18.

This Shabbat afternoon we begin the weekly study of Pirkei Avot, every Shabbat until Rosh Hashana. This week we study Chapter 1.

