

The Jewish Weekly

In Loving memory of
all the 45
Kedoshim
who died
on Lag B'Omer
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה

The Chassid Who Wouldn't Desecrate Shabbat in a Siberian Prison

By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton

Communism was supposed to be the solution to all problems of mankind and Stalin was its Messiah. He was revered as the 'Sun to the Nations' and the 'Father and provider of Russia.'

But, in fact Communism was an empty oppressive system that had no place for the human soul or spirit. All dissenters, even 'potential' ones were jailed, exiled or murdered and it is estimated that 'Father Stalin' was responsible for the deaths of up to fifty MILLION of his own people.

One of those people was almost Rabbi Gurevitz.

He was arrested for being a Chassidic anti-revolutionary capitalist and after a ten minute trial was sentenced to seven years in Siberia.

Being a quiet person that never made trouble he never thought it would happen to him. Not that he didn't know that the police were after him; the police were after EVERYONE either actually or potentially. The saying in Russia was there are two types of people; those that are in jail and those that are going to be.

And just being a follower of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, was already trouble. The Rebbe was prepared to do and risk everything in order to teach Jewish children Torah, which was treason. But getting caught and imprisoned in those days in Russia was sort of like death: everyone knows it's going to happen but everyone hopes it won't happen to them.

But now he was headed for a concentration, or rather re-education, camp in Siberia.

Most people did not last long in these camps but our hero decided that as a Chassid he must be as positive and happy as possible but never compromise his Jewish values.

He was shown his dismal barracks and assured that he would be assigned work and would prove to be a productive citizen instead of a parasitical traitor. When they asked him if he had a skill he remembered what he had been told by friends: if you don't say you are skilled they'll put you to hard labor and you won't last long. So he said he was a tailor.

Now the fact is that he was not a tailor but his mother had a sewing machine and he had watched her work a few times so he was sort-of a tailor. Anyway, he was certainly more of a tailor than Stalin was the "Sun to the Nations".

They took him to a huge factory that produced wallets, holsters and back packs for the soldiers, sat him down before a sewing machine, gave him several large, neatly stacked piles of leather cut to various sizes, showed him a few finished products, explained to him how to put them together, and left him.

The only problem was that it was Shabbat.

And one of the many things Jews are NOT allowed to do on Shabbat is sew

He sat in the chair and looked at the sewing machine like it was a big germ. It was even forbidden by the Rabbis to touch it! What could he do? He thought and prayed for an answer. If he didn't work it could mean the worst! But breaking the Shabbat was out of the question! What could he do!?! Suddenly it dawned on him that sitting there and doing nothing was also out of the question; everyone else was furiously busy and he stuck out like a sore thumb so, before the foreman noticed his 'sin' he got up and went to the toilet for a half an hour.

Then he walked around a bit, then sat down at the sewing machine, rubbed his hands and stretched for a few minutes as though he was about to start work and then he went to the bathroom again. But this time on his way there he noticed a room filled with beds. It was the room where everyone took a rest break in the afternoon. So, this time when he left the toilet he walked straight to that room, got into a bed, put the blanket over him and, hoping that no one saw him, didn't move.

Here there developed another problem; it was in the middle of the summer! It was blazing hot outside, the factory made it hotter and the blanket he was under was a heavy-duty winter special! So he was really suffering and it was hard to breathe. But at least he was honoring the Shabbat.

So, the entire day he lay there like a corpse and didn't dare move. His only hope and prayer was that they did not notice his absence. And his hope came true Almost.

In fact, they did not notice that he was gone but that evening they did notice that next to his name on the daily production list was written a big zero.

The next day he was summoned and escorted by two huge soldiers to appear before a board of judges for sentencing. He stood trembling before the wickedly mean-faced officials waiting for his sentence and then, to his surprise, one of the judges began speaking to him in Yiddish.

"What are you doing such stupid things for? You could get ten more years for not working! Why don't you work for mother Russia?"

"It was Shabbos, your honor! I couldn't work on Shabbos!" was his answer.

"But it was permissible! To save your life it's permissible! I know the law. You could get killed

It Once Happened...

for refusing to work!"

"Could be, your honor but I'm not working on Shabbos. I'm sorry, but I'm not looking for leniencies. I'm a Jew and Jews don't work on Shabbos."

The judges stared at him for a minute with no expression on their faces and then turned to one another and began whispering occasionally throwing a glance at him.

Gurevitz was expecting the worst but he prayed for the best, maybe there would be a miracle although such things were almost nonexistent in Russia where life was worth nothing. He imagined that they were discussing how many years to add to his sentence or perhaps which was the worst work force to assign him to.

"Okay Gurevitz" said another of the Judges in Russian. "We have the storehouse where all the leather is stored. Do you understand?" Gurevitz shrugged his shoulders and shook his head yes as to say, what has this got to do with me?

"Well, leather is a very valuable commodity and we have not yet found a way to stop the leather there from disappearing. It seems that no matter who we put to guard the place...well it gets stolen and well the guard himself takes leather. Do you understand? Instead of guarding from thieves they themselves steal the leather!"


The Yiddish speaking judge took over. "And this makes a lot of trouble for us. Do you understand. So, well, we see that you are a man of principle Comrade Gurevitz! If you are willing to risk your entire life for your principles, so probably, maybe that is, hopefully you won't be so interested in stealing leather. Do you understand? We are willing to take the chance."

Gurevitz shook his head in agreement. "I never stole anything in my life" he said.

The judges all laughed "Hah hah!! Never? Haaa Haaa! Never stole?! That is what all the previous guards said also! Ha haaa! That is what everyone here in this prison says! Haa!! But you are different, we SAW what you did. Now what do you say? With this new job you can keep your Shabbos too. Just make sure you keep the leather safe!"

Sure enough, for his remaining several years in Siberia he not only never had any problems with keeping Shabbat but was also able to learn and observe the Torah and even help others to do so as well from his position as guard of the leather bank.

Reprinted from an email of Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim, www.ohrtmimim.org.



Shabbat Times - Parshat Behar - Bechukotai

| | Candle Lighting | Motzei Shabbat | Motzei Shabbat ר"ת |
|-------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Jerusalem | 6:48 | 8:04 | 8:42 |
| Tel Aviv | 7:03 | 8:07 | |
| Haifa | 6:56 | 8:07 | |
| Be'er Sheva | 7:05 | 8:05 | |

Torah Compilations With Yossi

Parshat Behar - Bechukotai

How to Sell a Money-Losing Citrus Grove

By Rabbi Dovid Silber

Rav Eliyahu Dushnitzer, zt"l, had a son who moved from Eretz Yisroel to America. Wishing to provide his father with some form of income, he gave him an orange grove in Ramat Hasharon.

Shortly thereafter, however, the citrus industry went into an economic crisis and many growers were forced into bankruptcy. Not only did the grove not produce income, but it incurred large deficits.

Rav Eliyahu was very distressed, and he was constantly worried that he shouldn't leave over any debts when he left this world. What could be the solution to his problem?

To Rav Eliyahu, the answer was simple enough - just turn to Hashem our Father and ask Him to resolve the situation, so he Davened and pleaded to Hashem. In addition, whoever came in to see him was asked to Daven on his behalf.

One of his students, when he left his studies at the Kollel, entered the field of real estate. Aware of Rav Eliyahu's problem, the student found the ideal buyer for the orange grove: a well-to-do American who had expressed great interest in buying some agricultural property in Eretz Yisroel.

He arranged a meeting between the prospective buyer and Rav Eliyahu, and all three took a bus from Petach Tikvah to Ramat Hasharon to inspect the orchard. Just as they started the trip, Rav Eliyahu turned to the American and said, "I wish to perform the great Mitzvah of not deceiving a customer. Therefore, I want to inform you of the orchard's various shortcomings. Several trees have become insect infested. Others dried up or have rotted away. Also, in some places, the soil has developed ditches and pits due to neglect. As it looks now, the grove will be a bit problematic and will not turn a profit for a while."

Rav Eliyahu then proceeded to coach the man in what he understood to be good business sense. He said, "If you plan to buy the property as an investment and then return overseas, I must tell you that Chazal have taught that if one wishes to lose his money, he should hire workers and not be with them. It would not be a wise investment to try and manage this from America."

The man listened but did not seem concerned, and was still interested in the orchard. When they arrived at the site, Rav Eliyahu said to the man, "Chazal teach us that there is no comparison between hearing about something than actually seeing it," and Rav Eliyahu pointed out all the trees that were problems, as well as the pits and ditches.

Surprisingly, the man was still interested in buying the grove. During the conversation, the man took some pills and a small container of water out of his pocket, and swallowed the pills. He explained that he suffered from a heart problem and must take medication regularly. The man barely had the chance to finish his sentence when Rav Eliyahu declared that he refuses to sell his field to this man.

The man was shocked and couldn't understand why Rav Eliyahu had changed his mind. Rav Eliyahu apologized and said, "I am truly sorry for all the bother and inconvenience I caused you in traveling here for no reason. However, I just realized that the Torah does not allow me to proceed with the sale.

"As soon as I became aware that you have a heart problem, I realized that you are not fit for the hard work that this orchard needs. You will therefore have to hire help and you will be the manager. This grove is much too small to support a full-time manager, and you will be forced to manage it from afar. I can't allow this as Chazal teach that it is a sure way to lose one's money," and the deal did not go through.

Several days passed and Rav Eliyahu met one of his favorite former students, the Maggid of Yerushalayim, Rav Shalom Shwadron, zt"l. He said, "Reb Shalom, I have a special request for you, and I only feel comfortable asking because you are very close to me. You know about the situation I've been in with the orange grove. May I ask that when you return to Yerushalayim you visit a certain friend of yours from the Yeshivah?"

"This friend has established a Talmud Torah in Yerushalayim, and some time ago I met him and asked him to say Tehilim every day on my behalf with the schoolchildren, after they have finished the day's lesson. I know this person is very busy, and carries the responsibility for both the educational and financial needs of his Yeshivah, not to mention all his other obligations and Chesed that he is involved with. It is not a surprise that he forgot about my request to say Tehilim with the children."

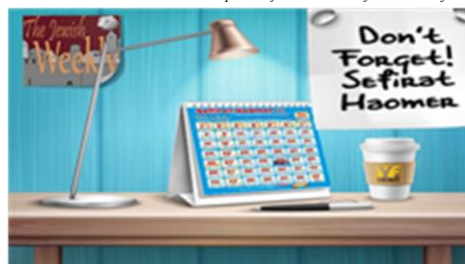
Rav Shalom said, "I beg the Rebbe's forgiveness, but how are you so sure that he actually forgot about the Tehilim?"

Rav Eliyahu replied, "That is obvious. The fact is that so far I have not been successful in finding the proper buyer for the property. Without a doubt, the only factor missing is the sincere Tefilos of the precious young children in Yeshivah!"

Immediately when he arrived in Yerushalayim, Rav Shalom went to see his friend and related the conversation that he had with their Rebbe. His friend apologetically admitted that he did indeed forget about the orange grove and had not started saying Tehilim with the children.

He right away went to the Yeshivah, gathered the young children together, and said several Perakim of Tehilim with them. In less than a week, Rav Eliyahu successfully sold the property to a skilled farmer who found all the orange grove's problems to be minor and easily correctable, and with the money from the sale, Rav Eliyahu was able to repay all his outstanding debts and obligations. This good fortune did not surprise Rav Eliyahu at all. He had never doubted the power of Tehilim from the mouths of the holy children of Yerushalayim!

Reprinted from an email of Torah U'Tefilah.



More than one million names of Holocaust victims are not known to us. I find this to be so heart-breaking. Entire families were wiped out and as a result, for so many victims of the Holocaust, no one has ever said a Kaddish and no Yizkor has been recited for them.

We derive some *נחמה*, some consolation for this, from a statement in the *Tochecha* in Parashat Bechukotai, which we read this week. Hashem gives us some hope. He tells us that the entire Jewish people will never be wiped out and he adds, *וזכרתי את בריתי יעקב*, 'And I will remember my covenant with Yaakov', *ואף את בריתי יצחק*, 'And also my covenant with Yitzchak', *ואף את בריתי אברהם*, 'And I will also remember my covenant with Avraham and I will remember the Land'.

Notice, that with regard to Yaakov, *וזכרה*, 'remembrance', is mentioned - *וזכרתי את בריתי יעקב*, 'I will remember my covenant with Yaakov'. With regards to Yitzchak, the term *וזכרה* is not stated - *ואף את בריתי יצחק*, 'And also my covenant with Yitzchak'. *ואף את בריתי אברהם*, but with regard to Avraham, like with Yaakov, *אזכר*, 'remembrance', is stated.

So why is there no remembrance with regard to Yitzchak?

Rashi introduces us to the concept of *אפרו של יצחק*, 'The ashes of Yitzchak', Yitzchak nearly became a martyr at the Akeidah and as a result, Hashem always holds Yitzchak close to him. Yitzchak is always in My presence, says the Almighty, no remembrance is necessary for him.

And if that is the case for Yitzchak, who nearly became a martyr, then how much more so is it the case for those who tragically did become martyrs and who were transformed into ashes?

Of course we recite a collective Kaddish for all victims of the Shoah and yes, we recite prayers at Yizkor time for all those who perished. However, no Kaddish, no Yizkor is said for the specific names - those individuals, their souls exist with the Almighty always. He tells us that He doesn't require that - they are in the highest celestial spheres of heaven. They are certainly amongst the holiest and the pure of our people.

We derive further consolation from the last two words of this *Passuk* - *והארץ אזכר*, Hashem tells us 'I will remember the Land' and isn't that exactly what happened in the 1940's? We emerged from the greatest darkness that we have ever been plunged into, the Holocaust, and within just 3 years we were blessed to celebrate the establishment of the State of Israel and next week Monday, May 10th, we will be celebrating Yom Yerushalayim, the 54th anniversary of the reunification of the city of Jerusalem during the Six Day War.

Through the merit of the 6 million victims of the Holocaust, may Hashem answer our prayer, *ופרוש עלינו סוכת שלומך*, 'To spread the tabernacle of His peace' over the city of Jerusalem and all Israel, *במתה ועד עולם*, 'Now and forever more.'

With this, let's try to make peace with all those we have issues with, and let's pray with all our hearts for the recovery of 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, happy Shabbat.

Yossi

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

Parshat Behar
NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 24
MITZVOT ASEH: 7
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 17
NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 57
NUMBER OF WORDS: 737
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 2817

Parshat Bechukotai
NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 12
MITZVOT ASEH: 7
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 5
NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 78
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1013
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 3992

HAFTORA: Yirmiyahu 16:19 - 17:14

This Shabbat we study Chapter 5 of Pirkei Avot

תשע"ט - ב'בדר - בחוקותי

Dedicated to all the 45 Kedoshim who lost their lives on Lag B'Omer in Meron