

The Jewish Weekly

The Kohen Pals Meet In the Forbidden City

By Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

Rabbi Shimon Freundlich, the Lubavitcher 'Shliach' (emissary) in Beijing [once known as the Forbidden City] China, and his wife run a successful and very busy Chabad House catering to the Jews that live, visit or come to do business there. His approach is so genuinely friendly that everyone that comes in contact with him or spends any time in his Chabad House is affected.

In 2007, while on a visit to New York, he was invited to be the personal guest of honor at the Tish (public meal) of the Rebbe of Satmar in the Williamsburg district of Brooklyn. Satmar is a very large, wealthy, and influential group of Chassidim that was for a long time at odds with Chabad for various reasons. Nevertheless, because of the many Satmar Chassidim that had benefited from the Beijing Chabad House, the invitation was extended.

Hundreds of Satmar Chassidim were present as their Rebbe whispered something to one of his assistants, whereupon the man pounded on the table and announced: "The Rebbe requests that 'the Lubavitcher' guest should speak."

Rabbi Freundlich began by thanking the Chassidim and their Rebbe for inviting him. He discussed an interesting idea from the weekly Torah portion, as is traditional and then asked permission to tell a story, something that had recently occurred in his Chabad House. The Rebbe nodded yes and he began.

"A lot of people come to visit our Chabad House for Shabbat, as you know. Well, one Shabbat evening a few months ago, an older man, maybe about eighty years old, who didn't look very religious, appeared in the company of a younger man in his forties.

"The old fellow found a seat and just minutes after we began the prayers he put his face in his hands and began to cry. He kept it up for almost an hour; he would calm down for a few minutes, dry his eyes and blow his nose and then begin again.

"I quietly approached him and asked him if everything was all right. He told me not to worry. After the prayers he and his friend joined us all for the Shabbat evening meal.

"There were over fifty people there. I sat him next to me and after he calmed down he asked if he could speak. He wanted to explain the reason for his weeping.

I stood, and after only a few words I introduced him. He cleared his throat and began.



Rabbi Shimon Freundlich with the Satmar Rebbe, Reb Aaron Teitelbaum

"My name is Sam Katz (pseudonym). The reason that I want to speak now is because I became very emotional this evening and I want to tell you about it. The last time I was in a Synagogue was over sixty years ago in Poland.

"I was a young man then when the Germans came and took the entire Jewish population of my city to Buchenwald. I was there for four years and in that time I lost everyone; my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, my friends; all killed, some of them before my eyes. But I survived and when the war ended I spent a few years searching for family or friends with no results. Finally, I moved to Australia.

"I was totally alone and angry at G-d. I managed to succeed at business and make a lot of money, and to marry and have children. But my wounds and anger were so deep that I swore to never go into a Synagogue or have anything to do with Judaism again. Nothing!

"But then just yesterday I came to China with my friend and he said we should visit the Chabad House. At first I didn't want to come of course, but he said that he'd been here before and the food is good and anyway there was no better alternative, so I shrugged and agreed.

"But as soon as the prayers began, everything suddenly came back to me. I remembered how good it is to be a Jew; how proud and happy my father and mother were. Suddenly it was as if a wall of ice just melted. That's why I cried. I thought I'd never forgive G-d again, but now I feel like a small child that just wants to be home. All thanks to this Chabad House and the Rabbi here."

The crowd clapped, wiped tears from their eyes and congratulated him for the beautiful story. A woman stood up and asked: "Tell me Mr. Katz. If you were in Buchenwald until the end, maybe you knew my father. His name is Naftali Kogen (pseudonym); he also was in Buchenwald."

It Once Happened...

Mr. Katz's jaw dropped, his eyes bolted open and he held his head in wonder "Naftali Kogen!? What? Naftali is still alive?! Why we were the only two Kohanim in the camp and we were always together. We risked our lives for each other, and not just once. We were like brothers! Oy! Naftali!

"There was such total confusion in those days; everything was upside down. We were put in different recovery camps and got separated. I searched for him for a long time after the war but finally I gave up. I thought he was dead. Now you say he is alive and you are his daughter! It's a miracle!!"

Rabbi Freundlich finished his story by saying that after Shabbat a meeting was arranged between the two old friends, and this is only one example of the miracles that happen in Beijing thanks to the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

At that point, much to everyone's surprise, a head of a Yeshiva in the Satmar community by the name of Rav Yaakov Kaplan (pseudonym) who had listened intently to the story called out! He raised himself in his seat a bit and fell back, his face pale as chalk and his eyes staring wildly at the ceiling. The others were startled and those seated near him rose to help him, but he came to himself in just seconds. He stood up to his full height and yelled aloud to all those present, "Tell them that Yaakov is still alive!"

In the midst of an emotional hurricane, he continued to call out: "There weren't just two Kohanim in Buchenwald, there were three! Sam Katz, Naftali Kogan and me too!"


He was obviously experiencing some sort of emotional hurricane.

"There weren't just two Kohanim in Buchenwald." He continued, "There were three; Sam Katz, Naftali and Me!

"We stuck together like brothers.... more than brothers. But just a few days before the end of the war I was moved to another camp. They probably thought I was dead, and I almost was, and I was sure that they were. I never considered it possible that they could still be alive even now!"

Needless to say, soon after this story there was another joyous reunion.

Reprinted from KabbalaOnline.org.



Y-GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times – Parshat Vayigash

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	4:00	5:16	5:53
Tel Aviv	4:14	5:17	
Haifa	4:03	5:15	
Be'er Sheva	4:19	5:19	



The Punishment Of Self-Exile

By Rabbi Shmuel Butman

It was already the middle of the night when the stranger appeared in the doorway, a thin figure dressed in rags. Obviously exhausted, the traveler looked ready to tumble to the ground.

The innkeeper, a warm-hearted, G-d-fearing Jew, immediately invited him in and sat him down. After bringing the stranger a warm drink to revive him, he served him an entire meal and sent him off to bed.

The next morning the traveler was much revived from the food and the good night's sleep. After praying the morning service and eating breakfast, he packed his meager belongings into his knapsack, thanked his host for his hospitality and prepared to leave.

The innkeeper, sizing up the man's outward appearance, stuck his hand into his pocket and offered him a handful of change. To his surprise, the stranger politely refused. Thinking that perhaps he had offended him by offering too little, the innkeeper added another few coins, but the man was adamant. "Thank you anyway," he said, "but I really don't need it."

The innkeeper was at a loss for words. "What do you mean you don't need it?" he asked after a few seconds.

"I'm not your usual door to door beggar," the man explained. "You may not believe it, but I'm actually very wealthy. In my hometown I own many properties, fine houses, fertile fields and abundant orchards."

By this time the innkeeper was completely confused. He demanded that the stranger give him a more detailed explanation:

"The whole thing started a little over two years ago," the stranger began, "when a large sum of money was stolen from my home. After the initial investigation, suspicion fell on one of the servants, a young orphan girl who was in my employ. I insisted that she be taken to the town magistrate, who would soon get to the bottom of the matter. But the policemen who led her away were very cruel, and they struck her repeatedly. As a result of the beating, she passed away a few days later. Till the very end she maintained her innocence.

"A few weeks after this happened, the real thieves were apprehended and the money was recovered. I became almost insane with remorse. My conscience would not allow me to live. Not only had I shamed the poor girl, but I had inadvertently caused her death. How could I ever expiate my sin? In my sorrow I turned to the tzadik (righteous person) Rabbi Meir of Premishlan for help.

"The tzadik's face turned grave when he heard my story. He looked deep into my eyes - into my soul - before speaking. 'You must choose one of three ways of doing teshuva [repentance],' he said. 'The first choice is death. This will save your portion in the World to Come. The second choice is illness, in which case you will need to suffer for three years as atonement. Or, you can choose to go into exile for three years. This is the punishment for taking a person's life accidentally.'

"I asked the tzadik for several days to make up my mind. Each one of the alternatives seemed too much to bear. I just couldn't decide. A few days later I started to feel terrible pains all over my body. A doctor was summoned, and he diagnosed me as having an incurable illness. I understood that the tzadik had chosen the first option - death - for me, as I seemed incapable of making a decision.

"With my last ounce of strength I went back to Rabbi Meir and asked him to pray for my recovery. I was ready to accept exile.

"The tzadik set several conditions. 'The first stipulation is that you must leave all your personal belongings with me,' he said. 'From now on you must only wear clothing that is old and torn. You must never spend more than one night in the same place. And when you are hungry, you mustn't ask for food but wait until it is offered. For three years you are forbidden to return home, but once a year, you may stand at the entrance to your city and send word for your wife to bring you your accounting books. Come back to me when the three years of exile are over, and I will return all your possessions.'

"I accepted my fate and set out, and for the past two years I have obeyed the tzadik's words to the letter. Just recently, however, I learned that Rabbi Meir of Premishlan passed away, and I don't know what to do. How can I go back to him if he is no longer alive? I've decided to go to Rabbi Chaim of Szanz for guidance." With that, the stranger concluded his tale.

The innkeeper, who was a follower of Rabbi Chaim of Szanz, insisted on accompanying him. When they entered the tzadik's chamber, Rabbi Chaim began to speak before they could even state why they had come. "Go home," he instructed the weary traveler, "but make sure you pass through Premishlan. Go to Rabbi Meir's grave and tell him that the Rabbi of Szanz has ruled that two years of exile are enough, for you have fulfilled them with true self-sacrifice."

This week's Parsha continues where we left off last week, After the goblet is found in Binyamin's bag, and he gets locked up for it. "ויגש אליו יהודה - And Yehuda approached him." Yehuda begs Yosef to show compassion for their Father, "how could we go back without Binyamin?" Our father will die from the news. Yosef can't take it anymore and he looks at his brothers and out of sensitivity for them not to embarrass them, he kicked out every Egyptian from the room, and he looked at his brothers and said these words "אני יוסף הערד אבי חי? - I am Yosef, can my father still be alive?" If this was a literal question it seems strange, that all three times the brothers came to Yosef they had conversations about their father, so why would he ask this now?

I am that Yosef, the very same 17 year old you could have sent anywhere, instead you sent me to Egypt a land full of immortality. Yosef did not see his father in almost 22 years while he was in Egypt, where he had to overcome the attempts of Potiphar's wife while spending the year there, and ended up in jail over it for 12 long years, for being falsely accused etc.

When you sold me here, and soaked my coat in animal blood and gave it to Father, you didn't put into calculation how much pain and suffering you put him through? הערד אבי חי? - can my father still be alive?

After all that his brothers put him through, Yosef says, "Don't worry, don't have remorse. Hashem sent me here before you so there would be food for us now." That was Yosef Hatzadik. A tzadik looks at any situation and can see the good.

We also find a similar situation by Mordechai Hatzadik at the time of Purim. Mordechai, who according to some commentaries, was Esther's first husband before she was taken away to Achashverosh. So, Mordechai lost his wife to Achashverosh, who sided with Haman to scheme and kill the Jews. Mordechai tells Esther after everything they went through "מי יודע אם לעת כוזאת הגעת למלכות? - Who knows if for this exact moment you were brought into the palace? And if you are not going to act now, the salvation will come from somewhere else, and you will be forgotten." Mordechai knew that by sending her into Achashverosh, this time, it meant that they could never go back to being husband and wife ever. Yet, he looked at the entire situation and saw there was one good thing that could come out of a very dark life.

Friends, daily we are faced with different challenges and situations that come our way. At times, we ask ourselves, why are we in this mess, how did I get here, What does Hashem want from me? We have to try to emulate the Tzadikim, the real true Tzadikim, who were able to look at the worst situations, and find the one good thing to keep their hearts, in a positive light throughout.

So let's pray with all our hearts to always see things in a positive light and for the recovery of all the sick from this crazy pandemic, as well as praying for our soldiers and healthcare professionals, and Chevra Kadisha members worldwide, and for 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 and sweet Shabbat.

Yossi

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NO MITZVOT IN THIS PARSHA

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 106
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1480
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 5680

HAFTORA:
Yechezkel 37:15 - 28

Tuesday, Dec. 14, is עשרה בטבת (the fast of Tenth Of Tevet).

פרשת ויגש

Sponsored in loving memory of
חיה ברכה בת ר' נפתלי משה
Mena Rabinowitz ob"m
Who's Yahrzeit is
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