

BS"D Pesach 5782

A Tale of Two Cities – Two Worlds

EXCERPT FROM MY BOOK "WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT"

In the Galut

Picture a *frum* family living in any one of the great Torah centers in the galut. They could even be your next door neighbors!

The home of Reb Sender and Mrs. Rayza is impeccable – the result of the great time and energy, not to speak of the money, which the expeditious and skillful *ba'alat ha'bayit* (woman of the house) has devoted to it.

The sofas and armchairs in the sitting room look so inviting, if it were not for the thick plastic covers which ensure that the upholstery retains its "new" look.

The five-meter-long dining room table is covered with the finest Irish linen table cloth. In the middle of the table stands the imposing sterling silver candle sticks handed down from mother to daughter for generations. The china is the finest Rosenthal, with each plate delicately rounded off with a band of gold. The silverware has been put away in favor of goldenware in honor of the great night.

On the table, under a hand-embroidered silk cloth, lay the matzot. On the insistence of the two sons learning in the recently opened Yeshiva Taharas Ha'Torah in Las Vegas (in order to bring the voice of Torah even to the entrance of Gehennom), the matzot are from the first 18-minute batch,

guaranteeing that no naughty piece of dough would be hiding in any of the rollers. The hand matzot were personally chosen by the rebbe of the shtiebel where the family davens, after leaving the central shul which was costing too much. The rebbe assured the boys that the matzot were bubble-free and with no overturned edges.

The wall-to-wall carpet is as deep as the grass growing in their beautiful garden. Above the table hangs the family's pride and joy – a multifaceted crystal chandelier, personally chosen by Rayza on the family's last visit to Prague.

Reb Sender is wearing his new *bekeshe*, the one with the swirls of blue, and a gold-buckled *gartel*. Rayza has just said the *Shehechyanu* blessing over the \$3000 dress imported from Paris. The boys are handsome in their wide-brimmed black hats; and the two girls, who will make beautiful *kallahs* when the time comes, are dressed in their very expensive dresses.

The seder goes better than expected. Words of Torah begin with an invitation to the hungry to join with them in the meal, despite the fact that there is not a needy person within 50 miles. A lively discussion develops concerning the characters of the "four sons." The *afikomen* is "stolen" by the youngest daughter who, for its return, has succeeded in extorting from her Tate a vacation to Hawaii.

Songs of thanks to HaShem for freeing the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt are recited, for it is a mitzva on this night for each person to internalize that he and she were slaves in Mitzrayim and experienced the exodus.

At 11 p.m. *Birkat Hamazon* is said, as is the second part of Hallel. *Chad Gadya* puts the final touch on the mitzvot of the night. And just as HaShem destroys the "Angel of Death" in the song, Tate jumps up and gathers the family in a circle as they all break out in a frenzy of song – *L'shana ha'ba'a Be'Yerushalayim* — "next year in Jerusalem." Again and again

around the table, *L'shana ha'ba'a Be'Yerushalayim* is sounded – louder and louder until their song merges with the same melody resounding from the neighbors' homes, cutting a path into the highest realms of heaven.

Suddenly, Mama breaks out into hysterical crying and collapses into a chair. The singing stops. Tate runs over and asks why she is crying just now at the apex of the beautiful sacred night.

“What do you mean next year in Yerushalayim? What about the table, the chandelier, the deep carpet, the Rosenthal China? How can we leave all this?”

Tate approaches Mama. He takes her hand while gently dabbing her tears away, and in a voice full of compassion says to his beloved wife, “Darling, don't cry, IT'S ONLY A SONG!”

In Israel

Ten thousand kilometers to the east, in Eretz Yisrael, lives Reb Sender's brother Kalman. Kalman had moved to Eretz Yisrael many years ago and was blessed with a beautiful family and an adequate apartment. His son, Yossi, will not be home for the Seder night, since he is doing his army service within the Hesder yeshiva system.

But the parents are not overly worried, because Yossi himself told them that he is in a safe place in the north and that, next year, they will all be together for the seder.

At 12 noon, on the 14th of Nisan, erev Pessach, Yossi and three other soldiers from the same yeshiva are called to the company commander's room, where he informs them that they have been chosen to fill an assignment that evening on the Seder night. They are to cross the border into Hezbollah territory in Southern Lebanon and man the outpost bunker on Hill 432.

Yossi knows the hill well; he has been there several times in the past year. It is facetiously called a "bunker," but in reality it is nothing more than a foxhole large enough for four soldiers. Their assignment is to track terrorist movements and destroy them on contact. It is tolerable except when it rains, which causes the bottom of the hole to be soggy and muddy. However, today, the four soldiers hope that it will rain, even though chances are slim since it is late in the season. To make matters worse, on the 14th of every Hebrew month the moon is full, presenting a greater danger when crossing into enemy territory. Rain would be a mixed blessing.

At 5 pm, they are given the necessary arms and ammunition. In addition, the army rabbinate has provided them with 4 plastic containers – each holding 3 matzot and all the ingredients necessary for a seder, as well as 4 plastic bottles of wine sufficient for 4 cups, and of course 4 Haggadot.

At 6 pm, they wait at the fence for the electricity to be turned off, in order to cross unnoticed into hostile territory. Yossi holds in his hand a map of the minefield they will have to cross. "It is so strange," Yossi thinks. "This is the area assigned to the tribe of Naftali, and we have to enter it crawling on our stomachs."

At 6:15 pm, the small aperture in the gate opens and they pass through. As they had hoped, it is raining and the thick fog is to their advantage.

At that moment, 10,000 kilometers to the west, it is 12 noon and Yossi's two cousins in New York are just entering the mikva to prepare for the Pessach holiday.

The 4 soldiers reach Hill 432 after walking double-time for 5 kilometers. They remove the camouflage and settle in, pulling the grassy cover over them.

Each soldier is assigned a direction. Talking is forbidden. If

any enemies are sighted, a light tap on the shoulder will bring them all to the proper direction. They are now ready to daven *ma'ariv* and begin the seder. They finish within a half hour, and the four cups of "wine" have no adverse effect on their senses.

At 6 pm in NY, the family returns from shul to begin their seder.

It is then midnight in Eretz Yisrael and the four soldiers are waging an heroic battle against boredom and sleep. The minutes crawl; and at the first approach of light at 4 am, they leave their outpost and return through the minefield and electric fence to the base.

At 5 am, after reporting to the officer in charge, they enter their tent and collapse on their cots without removing clothing or shoes; because in another hour, they will have to begin the *shacharit* service.

It was just about the time when Yossi's uncle, aunt and cousins were singing the song of "Next Year" and "Next Year" and the next – seemingly ad infinitum.

In conclusion: May HaShem bless all Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael with good health, peace and prosperity. And bless our brothers and sisters in the galut with the need, desire, courage and vitality to be free from foreign physical and spiritual bonds and come home to fulfill the most inclusive and challenging mitzva – *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*.

Chag Pessach Kasher Vesamai'ach

Nachman Kahana

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