

תשפ"ד · Bnos 5784

Parshas

Lech Lecha

אחינו כל בית ישראל הנתונים בצרה ובשביה העומדים בין בים ובין ביבשה המקום ירחם עליהם ויציאם מצרה לרוחה ומאפלה לאורה ומשעבוד לגאלה השתא בעגלא ובזמן קריב ונאמר אמן:



Story

THE CZAR AND THE SOLDIER

The Russian Czar Nicholas (Nikolai) I was a ruthless anti-semitic. He decreed that Jewish boys should be drafted into military service at a tender age. Thus, these poor, unfortunate children were first forcibly taken away from their parents and sent to distant villages to live among peasants, where they were brought up as Christians. Then they were drafted into the army to serve for twenty-five years. Under such terribly trying conditions, many became completely estranged from Yiddishkeit, and a few even gave up the struggle and converted to Christianity. These soldiers became known as “Cantonists” or “Nikolai” soldiers. It so happened, that the Czar would often disguise himself as a plain civilian and move among the people to hear what they might be saying about their czar. Once, in his disguise, the Czar entered a bar where peasants and soldiers were sitting and drinking, some already drunk! The Czar took a seat next to a soldier, who offered him a drink. The soldier did not know that he was “treating” the Czar, nor did the Czar know that his companion was a Nikolai soldier. This soldier now looked no different than the rest of the coarse peasant soldiers. When the Czar finished his drink he put down the empty glass on the table. His “host” immediately slapped him on the face. “Hey, what’s the idea of you hitting me?” protested the Czar. “Don’t you know you shouldn’t leave your glass empty? You must immediately refill it!” retorted the soldier. The Czar refilled his glass, drank it, and he and the soldier repeated this performance until they emptied the entire bottle. As if they had not already drunk more than enough, the soldier breezily ordered another bottle, although he had paid for the first with the last of the money he had in his money-purse. When the owner of the bar demanded full payment, the soldier offered his sword as a “pledge” until he would bring the money to settle the bill. The Czar and the soldier then left the bar together, holding on to each other like a couple of buddies and swaying drunkenly. The Czar, however, was not so drunk as to fail to notice what the soldier had done, and he asked him in what regiment he was serving. The two then went their separate ways. The following day, the commander of that regiment received word that the Czar was coming on an official tour of inspection. The soldiers were all thrown into a frenzy of preparation. They well knew how strict the Czar was, and how merciless he was towards anyone with whom he found the slightest fault. It could be that such a soldier’s very life would be weighed in the balance! One can well imagine the feelings of the soldier who had parted with his sword the previous day, and who could not possibly redeem his “pledge” in time for the Czar’s inspection. Whatever could he do now to save his skin?

Suddenly he had a bright idea which he hoped would work for him. He carved out a sword from a piece of wood, exactly the size of his metal sword, and fitted it into the sheath, hoping against hope that the Czar would not notice it. The Czar, resplendent in his royal robes astride his royal horse, came riding majestically among the rows of soldiers. They all stood at attention, their arms raised in salute. The Czar stopped in front of the soldier with whom he had been drinking the previous day, and the poor soldier's heart trembled, but the czar addressed himself to the soldier next to him saying, "Look at your uniform! Is that the best you could do?" The poor fellow was flabbergasted! He was quite sure that there was nothing wrong with his uniform. But who would dare argue with the Czar? So he began pleading with the czar that he would be more careful in the future, and would the Czar be gracious enough to excuse him this time. The Czar ignored the soldier completely and, turning towards his "companion of the bar," he shouted angrily, "Draw your sword and chop off his head!" Now the soldier with the wooden sword was in a double quandary. Anyone daring to disobey the Czar would surely be sentenced to death. Even had he been able to do so, how could he kill an innocent person? On the other hand, if he drew his sword as the Czar commanded, he would immediately see that the sword was not a genuine one but just a piece of wood! The Czar would rightly be furious, and the "swindler" would come to a sorry end. As these thoughts flashed through his mind, they were followed by a bright idea. "Your Majesty," he began, "I am ready to carry out your order, as you feel my friend is guilty. Nobody would wish to disobey the Czar. But if he is truly innocent, I ask the Al-mighty who, alone, sees into the hearts of men, to save him. In such a case, the Al-mighty can save my friend by turning my sword into a wooden one." Saying this, he quickly drew his sword out of its sheath and, to everyone's astonished gaze, there in his hand was a sword of wood! Only the Czar knew that it was all a trick, but he made no comment about the "miracle," for he could not give the game away without implicating himself. "Very well," said the Czar. "I will pardon your friend. As for you, I wish to promote you to the rank of officer." The Czar was very much impressed with his brilliance. It was clear that the Czar was determined to avail himself of this soldier's genius. He received promotion after promotion until he finally became a member of the Czar's bodyguard and personal advisor in the Czar's court. One day the Czar began to discuss religion with him and asked, "Are you truly a believer and do you attend church regularly?" "Yes, Your Majesty, I am a believer, but I do not go to church as I am a Jew." "You a Jew?" exclaimed the Czar. "And I thought you are a Christian and so promoted you from rank to higher rank." "The Czar never asked me about my faith. But I am ready to serve the Czar again as a plain soldier," said the Nikolai soldier.

"I have a better idea," said the Czar. "Become a Christian and I will make you a general. You will then be my personal friend. The Czarina and I will be your godparents and you will lack neither honor nor riches." This Nikolai soldier was taken aback at the Czar's offer. He had in truth been torn away from his family and faith at a very young age. He had no idea, in fact, if his parents were still alive. Yet, he had never entertained the thought of changing his religion. He always meant to remain a Jew.

The Czar, seeing his hesitation, began to urge him to accept his offer while, at the same time, hinting that things would go badly for him if he refused. So, somewhat reluctantly, the Nikolai soldier decided to say “yes” to the Czar, although in his heart he meant to remain a Jew, only pretending to be a Christian. Everything was arranged, the date set, and the Czar, Czarina and the Nikolai soldier all set out for Kiev, where the bishop was to carry out the baptism and conversion. The soldier sat in the royal carriage, followed by the court nobility, silent and lost in thought. Instead of feeling honored and elevated, he felt suddenly conscience-stricken. His heart sank and he was overtaken by a strong determination. How could he ever have thought of becoming a Christian (even if only in pretense)! A Jew he was born, and a Jew he would remain to his dying day! The royal carriage was then crossing a bridge over the river in the center of the city. The Nikolai soldier suddenly jumped out of the carriage and with the words “Shema Yisroel, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad” issuing from his lips, he flung himself into the rushing waters. His body quickly disappeared. The Czar, Czarina and the rest of the party looked on in horror at the unexpected tragedy. Sadly, the royal party turned back. The Czar, in particular, had become attached to the Nikolai soldier, and he began to think deeply about the whole matter. If these Jewish Cantonists could feel so strongly about their Judaism despite everything that could discourage anyone, then his plan to “Russify” them was obviously a failure and there was no point in continuing it. Thus, the sacrifice of this martyr was, after all, not in vain, for soon thereafter the Czar rescinded his cruel decree.

(Reprinted from Talks and Tales)

Parsha Quiz

**See how much
you know!**

1. How many times was Avrohom tested by Hashem?
2. Who was asked to leave his home and his land?
3. Did Avrohom know where he was going?
4. How old was Avrohom at that time?
5. Where did Avrohom go after leaving Choron?
6. Why did Avrohom later go to Mitzrayim?
7. Who was very beautiful?
8. What was Soroh told to say when asked what relation she was to Avrohom?
9. Why?
10. Who was the king of Mitzrayim?
11. Who was punished with a plague because of Soroh?
12. Why were there arguments between the shepherds of Lot and Avrohom?
13. What did Avrohom suggest to settle the argument between his shepherds and Lot's?
14. What land did Lot choose, and why?
15. In which land did Avrohom remain?
16. How many countries waged war against how many countries?
17. Which group of countries won the war?
18. Who was captured?
19. Who told the news of Lot's capture to Avrohom?
20. What did Avrohom do when he heard that Lot had been captured?
21. Did Avrohom, as the victor, take any of the spoils of war?
22. Did Avrohom accept the gifts offered by the King of S'dom?

Recipe

Mini Chocolate Pecan Pies

3 eggs

1/4 cup brown sugar

3/4 cup Haddar Corn Syrup

1 teaspoon Gefen Vanilla Extract

2 tablespoons margarine (use soy-free, if needed) or butter, melted

1 cup Gefen Chocolate Chips

1 and 1/2 cups pecan halves

2 tablespoons flour

1 9-inch pie crust, pre-baked, frozen

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

2. Place the eggs, brown sugar, corn syrup and vanilla extract into a bowl and beat until fully combined. Add melted margarine and mix.

3. In a second bowl, mix pecans with chocolate chips and flour until evenly coated. Place the chocolate chip-pecan mixture into the pie crust and gently pour the liquid batter over it. (don't need to defrost the crust).

4. Bake for 50–55 minutes. Serve gently warmed or at room temperature.

Middah of the Week

Mesiras Nefesh

We want to hear from you!!

Questions, comments, or suggestions?
Email us at bnos@agudah.org.
