

תשפ"ד · Bnos 5784

Parshas

Vayeitzei

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

KADDISH FOR TWO

Gemutlich was how an outsider would have described the scene. Bliss was what Marta felt, as she sat by the basement window trying to catch the last rays of sun before lighting the gas lamp. She didn't need the light for herself for she sat rocking gently, eyes closed, for the few moments of utter relaxation she allowed herself each day. Her son, twelve, sat by the window, sefer in hand, reviewing the gemorah he had learned that day. A few minutes after the sun had set the spell would be broken. Marta Blau would get up and busy herself with supper and tidying up, scrubbing here and there, washing the few things she and her son possessed, and doing the household chores that kept other hausfraus busy all day. There are so many things to be thankful for, if you just look at them in the right light, she daydreamed. Thank Hashem for this little room we have, so cozy and so easy to maintain. Not like the ten-room Katzenstein mansion I have to clean all day. I don't even mind the dinginess, for though little light comes in, not much dust does either. It's cool in the summer and easy to heat in the winter. But what bigger blessing could a woman ask for than a son like my Heinrich. His father, olov hasholom, would have been proud of him. I hear nothing but praises from his instructors. He is the star pupil in every subject. He doesn't

run around the streets like other boys, just stays home faithfully by my side. I can hardly bear to look at him for fear my heart will burst with pride. The last bit of light had faded. Marta slowly heaved herself out of her rocking chair. A long day's hard work took its toll if one stopped to rest. But once she had overcome inertia she moved briskly around the room, daydreams tucked tightly away in a dark corner of her mind to be aired out again on the morrow. Heinrich will be pleased with my surprise, she thought happily as she beat a batter for pancakes. My luck to be in the kitchen just as Cook was about to throw away the last pat of butter from the dish. Mr. Katzenstein demanded a fresh package of butter every day on his table and usually managed to polish it off on the thick slabs of fresh bread he consumed, helped by his children, zaftig Gretchen and plump Felix. The same farm diet had nourished him as a boy, though in those days he had worked off the food in healthy strenuous hay-pitching and other farm chores. Since then he had come a long way, exchanging his daybreak-to-twilight workday for a nine-to-three job in the Frankfurt Bank, with all the accompanying trimmings. Heinrich loves butter on his pancakes, delights in watching it melt into a golden pool inside the ring of syrup. It will fill him up nicely and, together with a glass of milk, should be quite nourishing. The boy looks a bit pale today. This will perk him up. When the sizzling golden pancakes had been transferred to the plate she called her son to the table. "I – I'm not hungry tonight, Mama. Do you think I could open the window just a bit? I feel so hot." Marta anxiously felt her son's forehead and dispatched him immediately to bed. "You are burning up, Heinrich. Tomorrow you stay home, and if you are not better by the time I come back I will fetch the doctor. Meanwhile, you must drink a lot of tea." That night, Heinrich developed a rasping cough that did not let either of them sleep. Marta left her son the next morning with a camphor poultice on his chest (like most people did in those times because they believed it relieved congestion) and strict instructions to rest in bed all day. When she returned that evening he was in a delirium. She hastened to summon a doctor, heedless that his fee would swallow up nearly a week's wages. His diagnosis was grim. Pneumonia with complications. Frankfurt of one hundred years ago boasted of then-modern medical knowledge, but there was little that could be done. Poor Heinrich grew weaker by the day, as his coughing grew stronger and racked his emaciated body. A week later it was all over. Marta had begged a leave of absence for two weeks when it became clear to her that her son needed constant care. The second week she spent in the cathartic seven days of aveilus. Mrs. Katzenstein had urged her family to go to the levaya and had herself paid the traditional shiva call. But once Marta returned to her job the Katzensteins forgot the tragedy. As for Marta – Can a mother's heart ever forget? Marta still had a goal in life – to keep her son's memory alive. Day after day she went to shul, clutching the worn siddur her husband had given her on their wedding day, to answer to the kaddish the shammash said for her son. The funeral had eaten up the tiny sum of money she had hoarded for Heinrich's education, but she managed to give the shammash several pfennig every day for the spiritual comfort of having her son's soul blessed and remembered in heaven and on earth. If she had lived before for her son – every waking and sleeping moment bound up in him, every fiber of her mother's organs and vessels existing only for him – she now lived for the perpetuation of his memory through the daily kaddish. The surviving spark in her life, it kept her going. Mrs. Katzenstein forgot her servant's tragedy.

Did not Marta do her duty as before, if somewhat more mechanically than previously? One did not ask one's servant, "Good morning, how is your soul today?" The children forgot even more quickly. Mr. Katzenstein, exposed to Marta daily as he passed through the vestibule she dusted from 8:45 to 8:50, was assured that his household was running smoothly, with each human cog functioning properly. You couldn't rightfully call Sigmund Katzenstein a heartless person. He never got angry, not at family nor at servants. He just expected to have his way, and he got it, for his demands were civil and reasonable. Katzenstein had a busy air of preoccupation about him. After so many years working with facts and figures, stocks and statistics, highs and lows, he became immune to human emotions. No one had ever bothered to analyze him, for he behaved in accepted fashion. He was a respected member of the kehillah, a kind father, a considerate husband, and a loyal German citizen. He surely had enough on his mind to keep him preoccupied. All in all, his state of mind, or lack of it, was shared by his colleagues and upheld as the norm. But every once in a rare while his kind nature shone through. The dorf boy who had nursed sheep through the night, who had empathized with calving cows, would awaken to a spark ignited by some outside force. Once it was the stray cat with a broken leg Felix had brought home; another time it was an apple cupcake he had bought for a cheder boy going home in a dark winter evening. Just a whim that he fulfilled as impulsively as it struck him and forgot as quickly. And one day it was Marta who pricked his subconscious into brief awareness. Several weeks after Heinrich's death, spring came to Frankfurt-am-Main. The river intruded into everyone's perception with its sound of boats and boathands. The winds brought the fresh smell of damp earth, an occasional whiff of dead fish. Sigmund Katzenstein was about to leave his house with a lightfootedness he rarely felt, for his feet had to support 250 pounds of flesh. He cast his eyes about and their gaze fell upon the faithful Marta. Poor thing, he suddenly remembered. She doesn't feel the spring. For her it will be winter for the rest of her life. She has only the grave to look to, no new life. She can't even be that old, can she? I've always thought of her as a fixture around here. She never changes. Even wears the same kerchief, same uniform, same look on her face. Poor woman. What can I do for this poor woman, so impervious to spring? He thrust his hand into his pocket and came up with the only answer he had come to depend on for all problems. "Here, Marta. Take these marks and go out and buy yourself something." Marta bobbed a curtsy of thanks and pocketed the money. She knew what she would do with the small bonanza. The next morning she approached the shammash in shul. "I've been paying you each day to say kaddish for my son, poor boy. I am the only one to remember him, and boruch Hashem, I am able to perpetuate his memory with the few coins I give you. But there must be some unfortunate souls who have no one to say kaddish after them. Is that not so? Would it not be fitting if I could have prayers said for someone less fortunate than my son, for some lost and forgotten soul? Here, take these marks and find in the records of the chevra kadisha the name of such a forgotten soul and say kaddish for him as well." The shammash took the money and the next day began reciting a second kaddish every day. Marta kept coming regularly to shul and proudly answered to both without the lump that had until now invaded her throat. After a few weeks the treasure was all used up. Loath to stop a good thing once started, Marta began skimping on her meals and household budget. She dutifully gave the shammash his few coins each day at the davening, secure that her son would live on in the world of eternal life where it counted, together with some other lost soul. The effort was taking its toll upon Marta, but living from day to day she did not realize it. One day, however, after Shacharis, kaddish, and a few words with the shammash, she was about to leave for work when an old man in frock coat and stovepipe hat accosted her. "Good day to you," he said, touching his hat deferentially. Marta was taken aback. "G-good day to you," she reminded herself to reply. "Tell me, good woman, what business do you have with the shammash each day?" "What a strange question to come from a stranger," she wondered, but she answered politely, "I pay the shammash to say kaddish for my son who recently passed away." "Is that all?" insisted the stranger politely. "Well, I have another matter I discuss with him as well." "Yes?" the old man's kind, gray eyes bored intensely into hers. "I pay him to say kaddish for someone else – someone who has no one to say for him." "Ahaa, I see. Here, then." The old man leaned his silver-tipped cane against the wall as he took a monogrammed case out of his pocket. With a grand flourish he signed a check, folded it, and handed it to the confused woman. "Take this check and cash it at the bank today. This should cover your expenses for a while." Before she could protest, he had vanished. Marta, a bit dazed, was thankful for her good fortune. This second gift would enable her to continue with the kaddish for both souls. Mrs. Katzenstein dismissed Marta early that afternoon, as the family planned to eat out. Marta hurried to the bank and presented her check to the first teller. Without even looking up he motioned her to the manager's desk at another end of the room. "You'll have to clear this over there."

Not too familiar with bank procedure, Marta did as she was told. Clutching her bag tightly under her arm she went over to the manager's desk and slid the check over to him. He looked at the check and looked at her. His manner was kind but puzzling. "Won't you kindly be seated? I must consult the vice president. This is a bit unusual." Marta was not accustomed to such deference. She sat down on the edge of the leather chair. "Do they suspect me of forging? Of stealing?" Her timid soul begged to turn and run but, too used to obeying others, she ignored the small voice inside her. Soon the manager returned from the vice president's inner sanctum, almost running in his attempt to keep up with the long confident strides of his superior, who turned to Marta. "Let me explain. This is very interesting. Indeed! You see, the sum written on the check is considerable. I would advise you to open an account at the bank rather than risk carrying all this about in cash. But it's the signature that really surprises me, if surprises is the correct word. Would you mind following me to Uncle – I mean the president's office? I think he should see this himself." The vice president debated with himself for a split second whether to take the woman's arm, for she seemed to need guidance. But she got up by herself and followed the two well-groomed men into the corridor that led to a huge, carved wooden door. The vice president let the brass knocker fall lightly and walked in. Marta hesitated as her shabby shoes sank into the plush carpet. She would have changed places with a street cleaner at a second's notice if she could have. Too late. She was again asked to sit, this time facing a huge walnut desk littered with crystal ashtrays, a silver cigarette case, a leather desk set, and a vast array of papers. "You say you received this check today?" She hadn't said. But forcing herself to lift her eyes to meet those across the desk from her she felt reassured. The man did not intend to bite. He even seemed kind. She began from the beginning and told how she had come to possess the check that seemed to have thrown everyone into such a dither. "Tell me, gnudige frau, can you perhaps describe this man to me?" he asked with a curious note in his voice. Having gained some confidence, Marta looked up again and stopped short. Her mouth hung agape. The president turned to the huge, full-length portrait that hung behind his desk, and upon which the distraught woman's gaze was focused. "Would you say that this is the man?" he asked, trying to be casual. She nodded in confusion. "Well, my good woman, the signature is that of the man in the portrait, my father, the former president of the bank." "But – but you look older to me than he did this morning!"

"That's natural enough. When he died of a stroke thirty-five years ago, he was sixty years old. I am, thank G-d, now 73 years old."

"Died? He's dead?" Marta exclaimed. And suddenly everything became clear. "He must be the very man I've been paying to say kaddish for." She forgot for a moment where she was, who she was, and burst out in a tirade. "This was your father? And you neglected to say kaddish for him?" The old man nodded shamefacedly, acknowledging the rebuke. "I, the famous banker, could not find time to remember my father. But you, a poor, unfortunate stranger assumed my obligation. And ... well, my good woman, I shall be blind no longer. You may live out the remainder of your days in luxury in my home. As for myself – I have a lot to learn. And I will begin immediately, with your help."

(by Sheindel Weinbach
Light Stories for Adults)

Parsha Quiz

**See how much
you know!**

1. Which city did Yaakov leave?
2. Where did he go?
3. Where did he sleep?
4. What event took place at Har HaMoriah?
5. What was to be built at Har HaMoriah in the future?
6. What happened while Yaakov slept?
7. What was touching the ground and the sky?
8. Who were going up and down?
9. What did Hashem say to Yaakov?
10. What happened to the many stones around Yaakov's head?
11. What was on top of the well?
12. What city did the shepherds come from?
13. Who was the son of Nochor?
14. When Yaakov came to the well, who was coming with the sheep?
15. Were Yaakov and Rochel related?
16. Was Lovon interested in Yaakov or in his wealth?
17. Who took Yaakov's riches away?
18. Who was older, Rochel or Leah?
19. Why were Leah's eyes sore?
20. What was Yaakov's request for his first seven years' work?
21. Whom did Yaakov marry first?
22. Who helped Leah with all the secret passwords?
23. How was Yaakov able to marry Rochel too?

Recipe

Sushi Cups

Ingredients:

2 cups cooked sushi rice

½ cup cooked salmon, small cubes or shredded

2 sheets nori, cut or crumbled

1 avocado, cubed

1 cucumber, diced or julienned

spicy mayo, for drizzling

sweet sauce, optional, for drizzling

sesame seeds

Instructions:

1. Start by layering cooked sushi rice.
2. Cut or crumble nori sheets over the rice.
3. Add some cubed avocado.
4. Add some cucumber. These can either be cubed cucumbers or julienned.
5. Top with pieces of salmon. Sprinkle with spicy mayo and/or sweet sauce.
6. Sprinkle the sesame seeds on top.

Middah of the Week

Sechar Mitzvah

We want to hear from you!!

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