

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



TWO HALVES OF A WHOLE

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week is the Yom Tov of Purim. We know that there is a mitzvah to give Mishloach manos, two food gifts to another Jew on Purim.

Why do we send gifts to each other on Purim, we don't do this for any other Yom Tov? The Sfas Emes offers a beautiful insight that is learned from this mitzvah. Purim is a time of renewed Torah learning. Learning Torah together brings Jews closer to each other. This is alluded to in the famous saying, "Veahavta Lareacha Kamo-cha, Ze Klal Gadol Batorah". Simply, this means, "You shall love your fellow as yourself, this is the great unifying principle of the Torah". But there is a deeper way to read that saying. Zeh Klall Gadol - Batorah,



A MODERN DAY MEGILLA STORY

This Purim, before reading the Megillah we will recite the bracha that reflects how Ha-Shem did miracles for us in the days of old in this period of the year. The implication is that even today, thousands of years after the miracle of Purim, in this period of year, Ha-Shem continues to perform miracles to protect us and save us from the evil design of our enemies.

Less than 70 years ago a tremendous miracle occurred to the Jewish people in the most hidden way, the Purim type of miracle where you won't see HaShem's Hand if you are not looking for it. But if you are looking at it, with open eyes, you will see HaShem's Hand all over it. While many readers may be familiar with this great miracle, there are many readers who do not know of this incredible miracle. Reb Yitzi and I felt that it is worthwhile to share this incredible moment in history on Purim itself.

In doing my own anecdotal research I spoke with Faina Vaynerman who was a teenager when Stalin died. She shared with me her own harrowing experience from that period. She was with her mother at the seamstress whom they knew for many years and many Jews were her customers. One day the seamstress told her mother that she is now scared to share a drink of water with a Jew. The anti-semitic propaganda was so strong that this seamstress actually believed that her Jewish friends would poison her and was scared of them. Stalin, may his name be erased, infected his empire with such fear and hatred for the Jew. He was actually organizing a letter to be written by Jewish leaders requesting him to please save the Jews from this horrible hatred. In the letter they were to ask him to please send us to a safe place far from all their enemies.

"They become a great unified group, through the power of learning Torah ". This is why we give gifts to each other. At the time that we learn more Torah we express that we are now more united, more of one unit. Learning Torah has the power to unify us as a community.

This leads us to the following fascinating story. Binyamin once planned to give his friend a very expensive, and very fancy cheesecake for mishloach manos. It was beautiful and cost a great deal of money. As Binyamin was bringing the cake over, he realized that even though he spent a lot of money on the cake, in order to properly fulfill the mitzvah he had to give two items and not just a cake.

He was waking up the steps to his friends apartment and he had nothing else to give. He suddenly thought of an idea! He had a knife in the car. He could cut the cake in half and give each part separately and then that would be two gifts. Could he fulfill his commandment to give mishloach manos by cutting a cake in half?

On one hand you can say it is like giving two cakes. But on the other hand it was one cake that was cut.

What do you think? Can he give a cake cut in half, and fulfill his obligation?

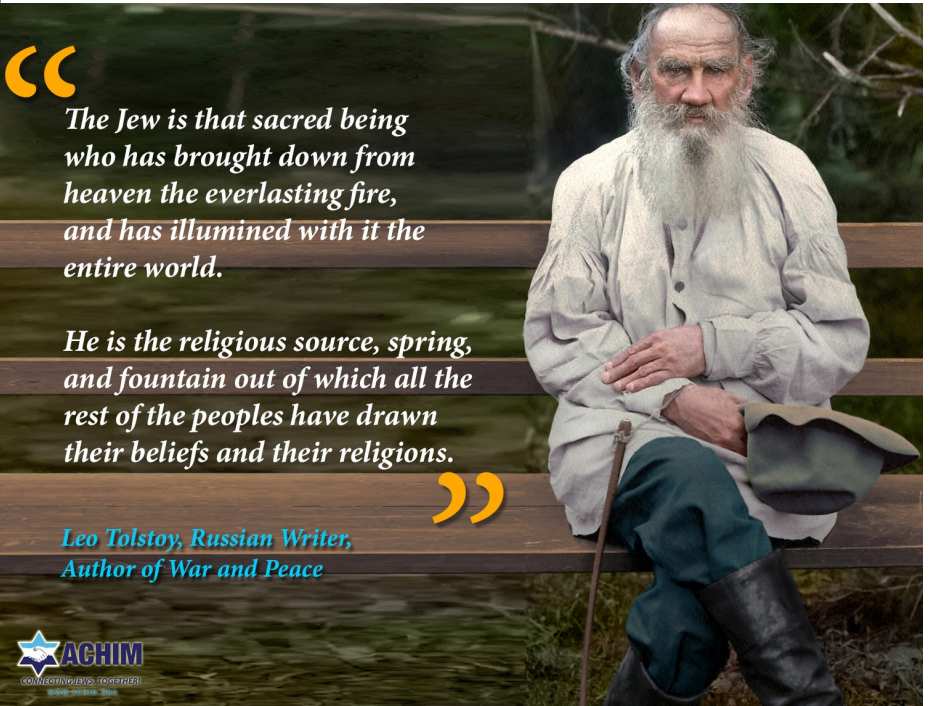
See Chashukei Chemed Megillah Page 115.



The Jew is that sacred being who has brought down from heaven the everlasting fire, and has illumined with it the entire world.

He is the religious source, spring, and fountain out of which all the rest of the peoples have drawn their beliefs and their religions.

*Leo Tolstoy, Russian Writer,
Author of War and Peace*



So let us begin the story of Purim 5713 / 1953.

It happened in the days of Joseph Stalin, who ruled over the Soviet Union, stretching from the Carpathian Mountains and the Baltic Sea in the west, to the Pacific Ocean in the east; from the Black and Caspian Seas in the south, to the Arctic Ocean in the north. For almost thirty years, from 1924 to 1953, Stalin ruled as a brutal dictator, jealous of anyone who could even be compared to him, and suspicious of anyone whom he thought might attain power or influence that could compete with his own. By plots, intrigues and brute force he arranged for the murder of such people, their families and their social circles. The Soviet Union had 200 million inhabitants, and Stalin systematically murdered between 10 and 40 million of them.

During Stalin's reign, west of the Soviet Union another brutal dictator, Adolph Hitler, attained great power in Germany and in many of its neighboring countries. He ruled them by terror and mass murder.

Hitler hated the Jews, and in less than ten years, he had exterminated six million of them.

Stalin and Hitler hated each other, vying for supreme power and control. Both dictators formed large well-disciplined parties which promoted specific philosophies. Hitler preaching "National Socialism" and Stalin preaching "International Socialism." Those suspected of doubts or disloyalty were murdered. Rivalry aside, each of these dictators was impressed with the successes of the other, and it looked as though they would agree to "divide the world" between them. Although a solemn agreement had been made not to fight each other, Hitler schemed to defeat Stalin through a deception. He had fabricated and planted documents which made Stalin suspect treason among his own generals. Stalin removed and murdered many of them, thereby weakening his army. His greatest general, Zhukov, was spared, because his army comrades would not testify against him, even under torture.

In 1941 Hitler unexpectedly invaded the Soviet Union, inflicting great damage on Stalin's army and country. Stalin became frightened and desperate. Believing that everything was lost, he locked himself in his safe place while his armies and people suffered the ravages of the war with Hitler that Stalin failed to foresee. Stalin's clique called upon Zhukov to help them rebuild the army and stop Hitler. And so he did. With the help of the Allied forces, Zhukov managed to defeat Hitler's troops in a bloody war which lasted four years.

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PICTURED: JOSEPH STALIN WITH MARSHAL GEORGY ZHUKOV

When the war was over, Stalin ascribed all of the victories to himself, even though he knew that others were aware that Marshal Zhukov won all major battles. Stalin could not tolerate any competition, and tortured two generals in order to get them to testify that Zhukov was leading a plot against him. Most high ranking generals denied these accusations, fearing that they, too, would eventually be removed. They demanded that Stalin leave the military alone. Since the military was stronger than Stalin's police force, Stalin did not arrest Zhukov, and only removed him from command. Zhukov was afraid for his life, and for this he never forgave Stalin.

Stalin did not like the Jews, in part, because many of his rivals for control of the Soviet Union were Jews. But he tolerated them during the war because they were of use to him as soldiers, engineers, and propagandists. He formed a Jewish Anti-Fascist (Anti-Hitler) Committee and even allowed the publication of a Jewish newspaper and the establishment of some Jewish schools. After the war, socialist Zionist leaders managed to convince Stalin that it would be to his advantage to support the creation of a Socialist State of Israel. Expecting that this new state would be but one more puppet regime subservient to him, Stalin helped to create the State of Israel and the Jews of his country rejoiced with Jews around the world. But it was soon obvious that this new country would not be his puppet, and that their brand of socialism was not the same as his.

To Stalin, this development represented too much of a betrayal. He began to murder Jewish artists and turned against all Jewish groups and individuals whom he had previously promoted, accusing them of treason. He quickly adopted Hitler's ideas about the Jews as wandering aliens who are never loyal to the country in which they reside. He began to think of ways to exterminate them. However, rather than publicly adopting Hitler's program of total annihilation of the Jews, Stalin began a systematic program of inventing heinous crimes that were being committed by Jews, for which only the death penalty could be sufficient punishment. He accused Jewish doctors of poisoning their non-Jewish patients, and of plotting to poison Sta-

lin himself. Jewish doctors were arrested all over the country. To incite mobs to commit pogroms, he planned public hangings of convicted Jewish doctors. He planned to publish, simultaneously with the hanging, a letter from prominent Jews in which they condemned the Jewish "poisoners" and pleaded with Stalin to save the Jews from "the rage of the people" by deporting them to Siberia and the Far East. The letter was prepared, and some Jews loyal to Stalin signed it.

Toward the end of the 1940s, Stalin decided to exterminate all of the Jews under his control. He classified them as "pure Jews" and "half breeds," with pure Jews being scheduled for extermination first, and half breeds being scheduled for extermination shortly thereafter. A census of the entire population according to ethnic origin had been ordered, and it is estimated that between three and four million Jews would have been murdered. All former and current military personnel of Jewish origin were to be killed as soon as possible, to prevent any significant resistance. Many Jews in the military were suddenly transferred to the Far East divisions where they had few connections with comrades in arms.

In the north and in the mountainous areas of the Far East, where frigid temperatures of -40°F are the norm, concentration camps of enormous proportions were built, consisting of barracks with no heat and no insulation, which could accommodate up to 1,000 people each. Rails were built from the barracks to ravines, while trains with cattle cars were being moved toward the major cities. There were plans for "enraged crowds" to attack these trains, and it was planned that only half of those who were being deported would reach their destination. Plans for distribution of the property and apartments of deported Jews were prepared, and some Jews were visited by expectant owners, even before they left. The formal operation was to begin in February 1953. There were rumors and signs everywhere, but many could not believe that this could actually happen.

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The complete census took longer than expected, and Stalin adjusted his schedule. The trial of the "doctors-poisoners" was scheduled to take place March 5-7, and their public execution would follow on March 11-12, 1953. The overall operation was to be supervised by one of Stalin's younger fellow-killers, George Malenkov. Stalin's chief executioner, Lavrenti Beria, was responsible for the operations of the State Security Forces. Stalin cleverly recalled Marshal Zhukov from exile in 1952, to lead the army once again, and as such, to play a major role in the deportation. But this is where Stalin made a fatal mistake. Zhukov used this opportunity to seize control of the army, and its power.

Stalin committed another mistake by underestimating his closest advisors. They knew from past experience that after each major purge, Stalin had eliminated those who had carried out his orders, claiming that they had gone too far. They knew that he would do the same to them after this deportation exercise was over. In addition, his close associate, Lazar Kaganovich (also known as the Executioner of the Ukraine) had been born Jewish, and two of Stalin's close associates, Voroshilov and Molotov had Jewish wives. In fact, Molotov's wife had already been deported. With so many military and governmental personnel fearing Stalin's future actions, Zhukov and others might have been compelled to act.

On February 28, 1953, following orders from Zhukov, all guards, military personnel, and service crews around Stalin's bunker were replaced. At the time, Stalin was in his bunker reading the results of the interrogations of the "doctors-poisoners," after which he enjoyed his usual late-night drinking, with his closest associates, until early in the morning of March 1, 1953.

During morning hours of March 1, 1953, Stalin had what was later reported as a massive stroke, and he died. That fateful day of Sunday, March 1, 1953 on which the plot to decimate millions of Jews, **was Purim**.

Stalin was buried on March 9, 1953, and his deportation and extermination program was discarded.

Consequently, the 14th day of Adar, takes on additional significance as we recall and observe in every generation, the deliverance of Jews from their enemies.

This account was written by the late Dr. Alex Rashin and his wife Bella of Teaneck.

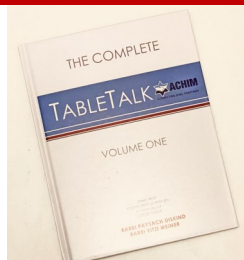


PICTURED: A SOVIET GULAG FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the mishloach manos, Rav Zilberstein wrote that he would likely not fulfill his mitzvah of Mishloach Manos, however, he would not have an obligation to notify them about the Hechser.



This week's TableTalk is dedicated לעילוי נשמת

Rosa Levin, A"H
רוזה בת לייבל

by her children Aitan and Yael Zacharin



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