

Every Neshomoh Counts

One morning as I (Rabbi Levi Bukiet) walked into the Bnai Ruven Shul of Chicago at 7:00 a.m. for Shacharis and took my seat at one of the tables.

Shortly thereafter, a very distinguished, prominent elderly gentleman, accompanied by a young man wearing dark sun glasses, took their place at the table in front of me.

After the elderly gentleman put on his talis shawl, he turned to me, and in a perfect english, but a heavy Israeli accent asked me politely, if I could show him which mourners kaddish and exactly when during the davening he would need to recite it. Today is the yahrzeit of my mother, he said.

I readily agreed, and asked him if he had a pair of Tefillin to put on. When he said that he did not, I asked him if I offered him a pair of Tefillin, would he put them on. He quickly responded, "betach", of course. I then asked the younger man, who I found out later was his body guard, if he would like to put on Tefillin, but he adamantly refused.

He recited every Kaddish until the very last one after Mishnayos. After davening while wrapping together his Tefillin, he turned to me and said, "You seem to be a very nice guy and I want to thank you for your help."

I would like to share with you a story about the Rebbe. However, I would prefer, not to tell it to you here in public, but rather in a side room of the building.

Together we entered a side classroom, as he began to tell me the following story.

He would not give me his name, but he said, I am today a retired General of the 1974 Yom Kippur war. Presently, I am in my mid eighties, but back then I was in my mid forties. I was a General and responsible for a battalion of over 150 soldiers.

Without divulging any classified information, he told me that on one day during the war they were ambushed and immediately 32 men of his battalion were killed, with many injured soldiers. This ambush and catastrophe was one of the greatest devastations of the Yom Kippur war.

As a General, I was responsible for the dead and wounded soldiers. Including their wives, children, parents, siblings and family. Constantly working with the families and loved ones to ease their pain and suffering. The families pain and suffering affected me on a very deep and personal level. To the extent of falling into a deep depression, and even having at times suicidal attempts.

A couple of months after the war, Washington requested a meeting with some high ranking Knesset members and a select few Generals, to meet in Washington. This was a top classified secret meeting. I as a General who clearly witnessed one of the greatest tragedies and devastation of the war, was asked to join the group as well.

A couple of days prior to our leaving Israel to America, I surprisingly get a call from my good friend, a "Chabadnik," Reb Shlomo Madanchick (obm). His immediate opening remarks were, "so I hear

you are going to be in America within the next couple days. Washington is not far from New York. Why don't you go visit the Rebbe and discuss with him your personal depression and anxiety concerns."

How my good friend R' Shlomo knew about this highly classified meeting, I do not know. But I readily agreed to meet the Rebbe in Brooklyn, after I finished my business in Washington. Indeed, I would break away from the group and head to New York.

Reb Shlomo made all the arrangements with the Rebbe's office, and one evening I entered the Rebbe's office and spent over an hour and a half with the Rebbe.

Together, the Rebbe and I cried throughout our meeting with the Rebbe constantly referring to the deceased soldiers as "Kiddoshei Elyon."

The Rebbe was very much **מחזק ומעודד אותי** with words of compassion and kindness. I was truly amazed as to how the Rebbe was so aware of the very inner secrets of the army, things that only the few and select high ranking officers of the army would be privy to.

At the end of the conversation, I got very personal with the Rebbe about my own internal issues that tormented me and caused me great pain and suffering. Mentioning of course the fact that in my battalion of 150 soldiers, we lost 32 soldiers in one swift ambush of the enemy, with many still recuperating in the hospital.

The Rebbe interjected and said, "I don't want to make your pain and suffering any greater, but the truth is, it is not 32 that perished, but rather 34." I adamantly disagreed with the Rebbe, telling him that I know better, since I deal with the soldiers and their families literally on a daily and hourly basis. Therefore, I said, "Rebbe, with all due respect, it was 32, and not 34 as you say." The Rebbe did not flinch and with great pain and heartfelt words repeated that he respectfully disagrees, and unfortunately it is 34 and not 32.

The meeting was very encouraging and it truly relieved much of my pain and suffering. But to be honest, I was utterly startled as to why the Rebbe was so opinionated and stubborn about the number of dead soldiers, something that I, the General living in Israel, would know better.

When I returned to Israel, I was welcomed with the sad news that two soldiers that were struggling for their lives in the hospital, had succumbed to their death. So indeed, the Rebbe was right and the ultimate total was 34 and not 32.

A couple of months thereafter, the very same group was once again summoned by Washington for a continuation of the previous meeting. This time I did not wait for R' Shlomo to call me, but rather I immediately called him and requested, he arrange for me a second meeting with the Rebbe. This time I was very anxious to meet the Rebbe.

Once again, after our meeting in Washington I headed to New York for a special scheduled yechidus with the Rebbe.

This meeting was by and large a repeat of the previous meeting, with many new facts and updates of the Israeli army internal affairs.

The Rebbe once again cried a lot and showered me with his great love, compassion, with deep felt concern for my emotional and heart wrenching pain. The Rebbe showered me with his blessings and prayers for a long and healthy life.

At the end of the Yechidus, I turned to the Rebbe and said, "Rebbe, I have to apologize to you for my disagreement about the numbers of the deceased soldiers. Indeed, you were right, it wasn't 32 as I said, but rather 34. But Rebbe, I asked, "How did you know this? Something that I didn't know, yet living in Israel, and dealing with the families on an ongoing basis?"

The Rebbe with his index finger, began tapping on his desk while saying the following,

"Every Neshomoh that enters this world, and every Neshomoh that passes on from this world, passes through this very room, that is how I know."

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