



## Being a Mensch Parshas Metzora

The conditions in Israel during the summer of 1962 were very difficult. The parents who had made Aliyah from the USSR were looking for a place to live. They chose to leave their son at the grandparents' house in Me'ah Shearim until they got settled.

The child became who became very famous in time – was named Yossele Schuchmacher, his parents were not observant, but his grandfather, Nachman Starks was a devout Jew.

This week, Schumacher visited Migdal Ohr and recounted his childhood. He explained, “My mother’s siblings were religious, but in Russia my grandfather was close with my parents who were not observant, but did respect Judaism and lit candles on Shabbat eve and kept Kosher.”

I asked him if he remembered his grandfather.

“Of course,” he replied, “he was a righteous man. My grandfather was told that my parents intended to return to Russia and convert to Christianity, and therefore he did what he did.”

Yossele’s parents could not attain financial stability In Israel, and therefore wished to return to the USSR. Yossele’s grandfather hid him to thwart their plan, and Yossele became the victim of a family feud.

“My grandfather was not a zealot,” Yossele said, “He was a Breslav Hassid, but the zealots stepped in “to save me” and then everything became political. I remember sitting in my grandfather’s home and then they came to tell me that my parents wanted to convert and that they were going to save me.”

The rest of the story is well known. Yossele was spirited out of the country, as everyone was searching for him. Prime Minister Ben Gurion declared then that “there has not been such a scandal since the founding of the state.” Israel’s security agencies were tasked with finding the boy.

In time, it became a religious war. After six months of searching Yossele was found in France.

What Yossele did not know, and I filled in for him, was that those who handled his smuggling, Rabbi Benyamin Mendelson and Rabbi Gershon Leibman, were G-d fearing Jews with large hearts who were pained by the fact that a Jewish boy was being taken back to Communist Russia. They has no intention of harming him, I stressed, and had no idea that the incident would generate a national controversy. They were completely focused on the wellbeing of a Jewish boy.

I added that when my father, Rabbi Yisroel Grossman would tell me this story his eyes would fill with tears. “What a shame, who

knows what will happen with Yossele?” my father was pained by the controversy generated by the incident.

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The Tur, a book of Jewish law, (paragraph 430, 1) states the reason why we call the Shabbos before Pesach, “Shabbos HaGadol” (“the Great

Shabbos”): a great miracle happened – the Passover lamb offered in

Egypt was taken on the tenth of the month of Nisan. The Jewish people left Egypt on a Thursday, and we find that the tenth of the month was Shabbos. On that day every family took a lamb for the Passover offering and tied it to their bedposts. The Egyptians asked the Jewish people why they were taking the lambs. They answered, “To slaughter it as a Passover sacrifice as our G-d commanded us.” The Egyptians were so angry, they grinded their teeth while thinking that the Jewish people were going to slaughter their gods. It is on account of this miracle that the

day is known as Shabbos HaGadol.

Just imagine: the Jewish people were slaves, whom the Egyptians beat and oppressed as they wished. The slaves were to take the gods of their masters and tie them to their bedposts. They would then tell their masters that in another four days they will slaughter the lambs. This is heroism to the point of self-sacrifice.

This gives an explanation to the well-known question, why did the nine previous plagues have no effect, while the tenth brought to the Israelites' exodus from Egypt?

The answer is that in the first nine plagues the Jewish people were not all involved. Moshe and Aharon acted as G-d had commanded them, they struck the sand or the water and the plagues came upon Egypt. This was not part of the last plague, the killing of the first born, in which all the Jewish people were involved.

After the Jewish people waited for Shabbos, the 10 of Nissan, risked their lives proudly while facing the Egyptians, they proved their faith in G-d without a doubt. This self-sacrifice earned, as it were, their exodus from Egypt. From here we learn the strength of Jewish self-sacrifice.

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At the end of the moving visit I told Schuchmacher, who is active in the “Be A Mensch” organization which works to bridge the gaps between Israel’s different segments of society, that he has a unique opportunity. After all his saga caused such division and animosity, now he is involved in healing rifts, sowing seeds of love and respect and sanctifying the name of G-d.

The event concluded with Mincha at the Migdal Ohr synagogue and Schuchmacher reciting Kadish for his grandfather. “He was a man of truth, and was only looking out for me,” Schuchmacher declared. I added “now you have returned to your grandfather, who was a true lover of the Jews.”

