



You Shall Make a Skylight for the Ark

Parshas Noach

Leilui Neshmas Meira Chaya Nechama Bracha A"H

Bat David Mordechai V'Zelda Shaindel Sheychu

The time: the period between the two World Wars. The place: the Old City of Jerusalem. The residents of Jerusalem stood cramped in the Karlin synagogue, in the midst of the morning prayers. Suddenly, a cry for help was heard, "Help, H-E-L-P", followed by sobs which shook all to their core.

These residents of Jerusalem were accustomed to violent actions committed by Arabs and vandals against them. On that day it seemed danger was imminent. That morning, the Arabs left their homes armed with knives with the intent of attacking anyone who crossed their path. The Jews, familiar with such scenarios, fled immediately after hearing the initial cry, and within a minute the synagogue was almost completely clear. Frightened, Rabbi Nachman Yosef Wilhem hid under the table; too scared to try and flee the scene. He was sure he was left by himself. He hid under his *Talis*, his prayer shawl, reciting psalms. After several minutes which seemed like eternity, he peeked from under his *Talia* to see if the danger had passed. He was astonished to see my grandfather and namesake Rabbi Yitzchak Dovid Grossman OB" M standing in prayer, completely oblivious to all the tumult around him. He concluded his personal prayers and waited for the

Chazan, the prayer leader, to continue with the congregational session of the prayers. Finally, he turned around and was surprised to find that the *Chazan* had left. He then turned in the other direction and saw that the synagogue was completely empty, and then he noticed R' Nachman hiding under the table, trembling with fear. Rabbi Grossman gestured with his hands, wondering why everyone had disappeared.

My father, Rabbi Yisrael Grossman OB" M, when he would tell us this story which he heard from R' Nachman himself, would add: "My dear sons, see and learn how our grandfather would pray. He was completely immersed in prayer. We learn from the Baal Shem Tov that when Noah was commanded in this week's Parsha to "Come into the ark"¹ he was commanded to enter not just the physical Ark – but an Ark of prayer and Torah. The world could be

stormy, but our grandfather would engross himself in prayer, secure and protected in his ark".

The founding Rebbe of Karlin, Rabbi Aharon the Great, writes in his book "Beis Aharon": "You Shall Make a Skylight for the Ark² - you should light up the ark, the words of prayer and Torah coming from your mouth should resonate with vitality emanating from the Creator". He added, that with a play of words (*Tzohar* –light, and *Retzeh*- accepted prayer, both have the same letters) we can learn that if one makes a skylight for the Ark, if one brings lights up the ark of prayer and Torah, he can turn any distress into a time of "good will" of prayers which are accepted by virtue of which he can be saved.

The Torah is everlasting, and if Noah was saved by entering the ark, so can any Jew escape his troubles by entering the ark of prayer and Torah. "Our grandfather was saved for a reason", my father would continue, "He survived the pogroms because he was consumed with prayer, and thus warded off all harm".

Seeing the old man's incomprehensible calmness, R' Nachman came out slowly from his hiding place. "Rabbi Yitzchak Dovid, did you not here all the ruckus around you? Everyone fled screaming?"

He smiled warmly, removed his *Teffilin*, (his phylacteries,) peacefully and said: "I guess I was occupied with my prayers".

"Oh, that was prayer", my father would conclude excitedly, wiping a tear of burning yearning for a world which was and has vanished.

¹ Beresheit 7,1.

² Beresheit 6, 16.