



How One Person Can Change The World

Some people change the world for the better, and some for the worse. What will you be?

The Pilot of the Jewish People

Louis “Lou” Lenart was a proud American Jew who was actually born in Hungary in 1921. At age 10, with anti-Semitism in Hungary rising, his family immigrated to the United States.

In 1940, as a strapping young American Jew of 19, he volunteered for military duty, believing in his heart that America would eventually get involved in WWII in Europe, which would enable him to fight the Nazis. He was right.

While serving on active duty, and this is in the day when the Air Force was a branch of the Army, he was sent to take a pilot’s course. He turned out to be the only Jew in the course, and he wanted to prove to them all that Jews weren’t just lawyers and bankers but able to be great fighter pilots, too.

In the start of 1944, then, he was sent off to the Pacific Theater to fight the Japanese.

When the war ended, he came back home to Pennsylvania—and only then did he, and the rest of the civilized world, learn about the horrors of the Holocaust. He discovered that that 14 members of his immediate family, including his grandmother, had been murdered by

the Nazis.

In 1948, the Jewish community in the Holy Land was fighting for its very existence. The British announced that they were abandoning their colony, and the United Nations decided to split the country between the Jews and the Arabs. The Arabs, perhaps predictably, refused to accept the division.

So at that point, the Israeli War of Independence broke out—600,000 Jews versus five million Arabs.

And all the armies of the surrounding Arab countries fought against the Jews: the militaries of Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, in addition to the Arabs who lived in what became Israel. The Jewish community of pre-State Israel was poor and had no military experience at all.

Well, the community leadership understood that one of the places where they might get help was the United States—because during WWII, thousands of nice Jewish boys signed up for, or were drafted into, military service, coming home with plenty of combat experience. In addition, it was relatively easy to purchase ammunition, weaponry, materiel, ordinance and all sorts of military surplus in the United States after the war—and, most important of all, donations from Jews with which to fund the War of Independence.

But the United Nations, causing problems as it tends to do to this day, imposed an embargo on the Middle East, meaning that it was forbidden for any member nation to sell military materiel to any party to the conflict. The United States, for some reason, was all too happy to abide by that immoral embargo—rendering it illegal for any American to sell any military items to Israel.

What's more, it was now also illegal for any American citizen to join Israel's war—and any American who did so would forfeit their

citizenship, and would even likely stand trial and go to prison upon return to the United States.

Despite that all, Lou Lenart decided that he was going to leave it all behind, and so he went ahead and signed up for Israel's War of Independence.

A few days later, he said that the Holocaust had led him to conclude that Jews needed to stand up and fight for themselves, and that they deserved a place where they could live like free men.

Now, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) that was now being born had neither pilots nor planes. And so, when a young American Jewish fighter pilot with seven years of flying experience, including several in combat, showed up in Israel, it was simply a life-saver.

And so, together with several agents of the Haganah, the forerunner to Israel's military, he purchased several old fighter planes and smuggled them from the United States to Panama, and from there, via other countries to Italy. Once the planes were in Rome, he was asked to fly a single-engine plane to Israel.

Lou Lenart later said the flight from Italy to Israel was 11-and-a-half hours, and that throughout the entire flight, he had been staring at the single propeller, praying that it would keep spinning. But the biggest miracle of all was that the plane didn't run out of gas for the entire long flight, and for him, it was his personal "miraculous jug of oil."

In those days, when Lou got to Israel, Israel's air force consisted of four planes and four pilots, with one of the four being himself. He also was the pilot with the most expertise.

So on May 29th, word came down that the Egyptian army was getting close to Tel Aviv and was already only five miles away. They needed to stop them.

Lenart led the four aircraft off the runway and into the air. Each plane was loaded with bombs. As soon as he got airborne, he felt that this was the high point of his life—going out in defense of the Jewish Nation.

However, he had one problem: He didn't know the turf, and the four aircraft didn't have radios. So one other pilot directed him with hand signals until he was able to identify the Egyptian forces. It was a mighty force: Hundreds of trucks and tanks and thousands of soldiers were arrayed before him.

He looked behind him and saw the residents of Israel, and looked in front of him and saw the enemy army in full array, some 14,000 soldiers. He cried out, "Shma Yisrael!" and dove right at the center of the Egyptian formation, followed by the three other aircraft. They released their bombs directly onto the giant convoy.

For the Egyptian army, which had no idea at all that "the Jews" had an air force, it was an absolute shock. The surprise attack succeeded in dispersing the Egyptian advance towards Tel Aviv, and ultimately in saving Israel.

Years later, Lou Lenart would say that he felt that the reason he was spared from any enemy harm during WWII was so that he would be able to be there at the critical moment when the Jewish Nation in Israel needed to be saved—when four young Jewish men, two Israelis, one South African and one American, saved the entire Jewish community in Israel and secured history for generations.

Kamtza and Bar Kamtza

Well, Tisha B'Av is upon us, and we will gather once again to mourn the Destruction of the Temple.

One of the most famous stories of all relating to Tisha B'Av is that of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza—how one of Jerusalem's wealthiest men

threw a party and sent his butler to invite his friend Kamtza. Well, what do you know, but the butler went and accidentally invited someone name Bar Kamtza instead.

The problem was that the rich man had a serious resentment issue with this Bar Kamtza fellow.

So when the rich guy shows up at his own party and sees Bar Kamtza, a guy he can't stand, sitting there, he flew into a rage and told Mr. Bar Kamtza, and probably in no uncertain terms, that he was to vacate the premises immediately.

Well, Bar Kamtza felt humiliated, and begged the rich guy—it's interesting that the Talmud does not openly tell us his name—to not embarrass him any further in front of everyone by letting him stay at the party in exchange for him, Bar Kamtza, paying for the cost of whatever he'd eat or drink.

But the rich socialite didn't agree, and insisted that Bar Kamtza leave.

Bar Kamtza offered to pay for half the cost of the entire party just as long as the host would refrain from inflicted such humiliation on him, but the host still insisted that he get out. Bar Kamtza next offered to pay for the cost of the entire party—but the host grabbed him by the hand and physically threw him out.

Once outside, though, Bar Kamtza fumed not so much at the host but at the various Sages who had been guests at the event—who had been there and had witnessed the entire confrontation but had not protested. So Bar Kamtza, burning with resentment at "the rabbis" (something that we are all too familiar with), went to Rome and slandered his own people, saying that they were plotting rebellion against the Empire.

And so, the Talmud tells us, Jerusalem was destroyed because of the

“Kamtza and Bar Kamtza Case”—in other words, the Talmud blames the entire Destruction of the Second Temple and Roman Exile on Mr. Bar Kamtza.

Who Will You Be?

Now, the Rebbe would always quote the well-known words of the Rambam in his Laws of Teshuvah (3:8): “Thus, a person must always see himself... and likewise, the entire world, as half innocent and half guilty. If he does one sin, he tilts himself and the entire universe to the side of guilt and brings destruction upon them. If he does one mitzvah, he tilts himself and the entire universe to the side of good and brings redemption and rescue upon them.”

These two stories verify the words of the Rambam.

On the one hand, you have the “Kamtza and Bar Kamtza Case,” in which one person’s actions “tilted the entire universe to the side of guilt and brought destruction upon them” by bringing destruction upon himself and the Holy Temple and causing the entire Jewish Nation to go into exile—and to this day, we are suffering from the results of that one action.

On the other hand, that one Jew named Lou Lenart, who risked his life and even said “Shma Yisrael!” tilted the entire universe to the side of good and brought redemption and rescue upon them” for generations upon generations—because that war changed history forever.

The lesson in all of this, my friends, is that a person must never think, “Who am I and what am I?” A person must never think that his or her action will make no difference either way.

On the contrary! These two stories teach us that one person can indeed change the world. Let us remember that.

Good Shabbos!