

The Kaddish Dream

Category: Devarim, Shoftim

A visit from the afterlife.

The Dream

I would like to share a story about my mother, Mrs. Devorah Greenberg, who recently passed away.

My parents lived in Moscow in the 1960s. Life was difficult for everyone, but this was especially true for those trying to observe Judaism. One of the most significant challenges was observing Shabbos—in a communist society, everyone was required to work or else they would be considered a ‘parasite,’ a public burden, but the workweek was six days long, and the only day of rest was Sunday. This posed a real problem for my father.

To resolve the issue, he would approach Jewish factory administrators and ask them to turn a blind eye to his weekly absence, and often they would agree. However, after a period of about nine or ten months, the other workers would begin noticing that my father was “sick” every week, just on Shabbos, and the administrators would begin to fear that they would be reported for allowing such behavior at the factory. Thus, my father would be advised to find another job.

These administrators were often very well meaning, and they would sometimes personally arrange a new job, but after going this route several times, my parents realized that they needed to find a more permanent solution.

They came up with a new idea. Russian law allowed disabled people to work only five days a week. But to claim this disability allowance, they needed a doctor to confirm that he was truly disabled. But where would they find a doctor, in Moscow of the early 1960s, who would agree to provide a false certificate just for religious reasons—a dangerous, ‘counterrevolutionary’ behavior?

My parents knew a kind Jewish couple, Mr. and Mrs. Girzon, who were well-connected and were known for their acts of kindness. My parents approached them, and after pulling some connections, Mrs. Girzon managed to acquire the

needed certificate. With this certificate in hand, my father found a job in a fabric store, where he was allowed to have two days off a week, enabling him to observe Shabbos.

In 1966, our family immigrated to Israel, and a few years later, they received a telegram from Russia that Mrs. Girzon had passed away.

A few days later, my mother had a dream where she saw Mrs. Girzon standing sadly at the entrance of her home. This was unusual; my mother never had dreams—she didn't have time to dream—so this unique image bothered her. A few nights later, the dream recurred; Mrs. Girzon was standing at the door, looking melancholy.

It suddenly occurred to my mother that Mrs. Girzon didn't have anyone to say Kaddish for her. Although she had a son and a daughter, they were not observant, and regardless, it was nearly impossible for someone to say Kaddish regularly in those years in Russia. My father decided that he would say Kaddish for her.

Just a few nights later, my mother had another dream: Mrs. Girzon stood there with a joyful face, bringing my mother a bottle of wine as a gift.

From Sadness to Joy

Every sadness within Judaism is inevitably paired with an ensuing moment of joy.

Take Tisha B'Av, for instance, which is followed closely by Tu B'Av—a day that held a significant holiday status during the biblical era. Our Sages remarked, "No days were as festive for the Jewish people as the Fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur." Why such exuberance? It's rooted in the stark contrast with the profound sorrow of Tisha B'Av, just a few days earlier (refer to 20 Av 5721, Sicha 2).

The same is true of Sukkot.

The joy experienced during Sukkot stands unparalleled. While the Torah instructs us to rejoice during all three festivals—Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot—the commandment to rejoice isn't explicitly emphasized for Passover, and is only mentioned once for Shavuot. Yet, for Sukkot, this commandment is repeated three times.

Why this exceptional emphasis on Sukkot's joy? The Rebbe explains that it emerges as a result of Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur originates from the penitence of the Jewish people after the incident of the Golden Calf. Shavuot fell on the 6th of Sivan, the Golden Calf incident took place forty days later on the 17th of Tammuz, Moses then ascended the mountain for another forty days to plead for forgiveness, and those culminated in the observance of Yom Kippur.

Consequently, the joy of Sukkot outshines all other festivals—due to its emergence from the solemnity of Yom Kippur.

A similar pattern emerges with Shiva. There's a similarity between the mourning laws during Shiva and those on Tisha B'Av. While we thankfully don't fast during Shiva, a similarity exists concerning Torah study. Both Tisha B'Av and Shiva prohibit Torah study. Why? Because studying Torah inherently brings joy, and during mourning, abstaining from happiness is paramount.

So, just as Tisha B'av brings forth a moment of joy, emerging from a Shiva period is a time of elevation, potential growth, and joy as well.

In fact, when the Rebbe observed Shiva for his wife, the Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, OBM, he drew upon a Midrash: After Moses shattered the first tablets, G-d consoled him, saying, "Do not grieve over the loss of the first tablets; they contained merely the Ten Commandments. The second pair will encompass halachos, midrash, agaddah, and more." In a similar vein, the Sages posit that "If not for the sin of the Golden Calf, we would have received solely the five books of Moses and the book of Joshua." It was precisely due to the spiritual nadir of the Golden Calf episode that we gained the opportunity to ascend and receive the rest of the Torah. Remarkably, Moses' radiant countenance manifested specifically after that low point (Sefer Hasichos 5752, vol. 2 pg. 423).

The passing of a Jewish individual resembles the shattering of the tablets. Just as G-d urged Moses not to anguish, the Rebbe explained that G-d similarly exhorts us, "Do not grieve." This moment of anguish presents a moment of growth for the mourners and the broader Jewish community, in which the desire to honor their memory prompts us to embark on newfound endeavors for Yiddishkeit.

May her memory be a blessing.