

# Can Mental Telepathy reach the Hostages?

*What can we do to help our brethren held in captivity?*

## **The Hostage Crisis**

Last week, I attended the Kinus Hashluchim, the conference of Chabad rabbis. On Sunday morning, I prayed at the Rebbe's gravesite, and as usual—despite the large crowd—it was very quiet, with everyone doing their own personal prayers.

Then, out of nowhere, someone broke the silence. One of the rabbis asked for everyone's attention, and told us that the woman standing next to him had lost her parents in the attack on Simchat Torah, and that her husband and three kids had been kidnapped by Hamas. Since then, she hasn't had a single sign of life from them.

He asked us to join him in praying for their safety and for their quick return home. Of course, everyone joined in; the woman standing there crying seemed so broken and tired that she had almost no tears left.

The next evening, on Erev Rosh Chodesh Kislev, Chabad in Israel brought in a group of 150 people who are relatives of the kidnapped to pray at the Ohel for their loved ones as well. I heard that the tears that were shed during those moments were enough to fill the entire Sea of Galilee. The next day, they went to Washington to meet with senators and members of Congress

from both sides of the aisle, and each senator promised to do everything they could to bring the captives back home.

Now, the question is, what can regular people like us, without any fancy connections, do to help the hostages?

## **They Were Never Forgotten**

Back in the 1940s, Russia was sealed tight—no one in, and no one out. It was the world's largest prison.

Then, there was a crack in the wall. Right after World War II, an agreement was struck between Russia and Poland to allow Polish citizens who fled into Russia during the war to return to their homeland.

When Chabad Chassidim heard about the agreement, they immediately started thinking about how to take advantage of it. They realized that if they could forge documents claiming they were Polish citizens, they could leave Russia. In no time, a whole industry of forgery sprang up, and some one thousand people—if not more—successfully crossed the border as Polish citizens, despite the fact that they didn't speak a word of Polish!

But like any secret, it eventually came to an end. The government caught wind of the operation and shut it down abruptly. Those who orchestrated the escape were thrown into prison. Many people whose families had already left Russia were supposed to follow but got stuck in Russia for years, unable to communicate with their families due to the KGB censor and so on.

Twenty years passed. Then, one day, the Rebbe sent a young

man named Rabbi Binyomin Katz, of blessed memory, to Russia. Rabbi Katz was just twenty five years old, but he had a photographic memory, and his task was to memorize the names of Russian Jews so that invitations, could be sent to them from families with the same names in Israel, inviting them to join as part of a “family unification initiative.”

He arrived in Russia in 1965, after twenty years in which the Russian Chassidim hadn't seen a single friendly face from across the border. On the last night of his visit, as he was finishing a meeting with a young couple on one of the dark streets of the city, two guys grabbed him by his arms. At first, he panicked, thinking it was the KGB, but then they spoke to him in Yiddish, telling him not to be afraid. He immediately recognized them by the way they spoke, because they sounded exactly like their father/brother, Motchkin and Vishedsky, who were already living in the free world.

They had a warm conversation and he brought them regards from their family, and then they asked him a loaded question. “Tell us, do the Chassidim in America think about us?”

“I don't know what's in every person's heart,” he told them, “but one thing is certain - the Rebbe thinks about you constantly, and doesn't let others forget.” He told them about one specific farbrengen on Shavuot 5724, when the Rebbe called out in an upset tone; “We are all sitting here together, and no one has said ‘L'chaim’ for the Jews in Russia?!”

The two men listened emotionally, and began to cry. They hugged him, and with that message, they parted. When they

finally left Russia years later, they told him that what gave them strength to endure all the difficulties in Russia was the knowledge that the Rebbe and the Chassidim on the other side of the world were thinking about them and praying for their well-being. (Dyedushka, page 416).

Nathan Sharansky shared a similar point during his speech in Washington at the March for Israel this week. When he was imprisoned in a Russian jail as a Zionist activist, investigators repeatedly told him he was alone, forgotten by everyone, that no one cared about him, and that he had failed in his fight against the mighty Soviet Union.

What sustained him were those Jews who came from the United States, Canada, and Britain to support him in Russia. They proved to him that the KGB was lying. The notion that he was remembered, and people were fighting for him, gave him the strength to continue his struggle for freedom. He said that he didn't know what his personal future held, but he was certain that in the end, the Jewish people would triumph.

What captives need more than anything is to know that they are not forgotten, that people haven't given up on them, that they are actively sought after, and that everything possible is being done to bring them back home.

Recently, the media reported that the IDF took control of a mosque in Gaza and played Shema Yisrael through its loudspeakers to alert any captives who might be in the area—letting them know that the IDF is approaching, and that they should remain strong.

But we remain with a question: How can regular people like us, convey to the captives the assurance that they are not forgotten?

## **Telepathy**

The Rebbe once cited the teaching in the Talmud, “G-d performed an act of charity with Israel by scattering them among the nations” (Pesachim 87b.)

The Rebbe explained, based on Rashi, that this was done so that we could never be annihilated together. Since the Jewish people are dispersed and scattered across several countries, no single nation has the ability to annihilate them, and that also prevents individual nations from trying to kill the Jews under their control as well. On a similar, spiritual note, the Rebbe said, when one country imposes restrictions on Torah study or the observance of a mitzvah, Jews in other countries are able to observe those mitzvos nonetheless. So, Torah and mitzvos will never become fully extinct. (Maamar 19 Kislev 5714, Toras Menachem vol. 10, p. 209).

In simple terms, the dispersal ensures the survival of Jews, not only physically but also spiritually. It allows the possibility for Torah and mitzvos to survive.

However, the Rebbe takes this concept to a deeper level. There is a Jewish concept called “*Machshava Mo’eles*, Effective Thoughts,” which corresponds to what is called in secular terms “mental telepathy.” It is a type of perception on a sensory level that enables a person to consciously or unconsciously transmit thoughts, emotions, or feelings to another person. It is the

ability to transfer thoughts from one person to another.

The Rebbe explained that when a Jew fulfills a mitzvah that someone else cannot perform, and he thinks about that person, it gives him the strength and courage to withstand his difficult situation and strengthen his commitment to Torah and Mitzvos.

Imagine a woman lighting Shabbat candles, thinking not only of herself but also of a specific hostage who is unable to do the same at the moment. Her thoughts empower that hostage to survive the loneliness and the challenges, because she intrinsically gets the feeling that someone is thinking about her.. Likewise, when a man dons tefillin and thinks about the hostages he has heard about and seen, he does it on their behalf, and sends them the strength and hope for eventual freedom.

The Rebbe goes even further. Some people aren't physically captive but feel imprisoned by their own inclinations. For example, there are people who do not like to pray; it doesn't resonate with them, it's not their thing. They are good people, they contribute to charity, but prayer is not for them. On the other hand, there are those who love to pray, always happy to complete a minyan, but when it comes to charity, they have separation anxiety; they simply cannot part with their money. They will donate a kidney quicker than money! Each person is captive in a specific mitzvah, unable to help themselves.

Therefore, when the one who loves to pray, has his friend in mind, he subconsciously influences him and gives him the strength to overcome his inclination. When one who is very

generous intends to give charity also for his friend, the thought makes it easier for his friend to give charity by himself as well.

## **Esau's Blessing**

A similar concept about the power of thought is evident in this week's Torah portion, Toldos. We read about "stealing blessings" — Isaac, intending to bless Esau, asks him to prepare a meal, but Rebecca overhears the conversation and instructs Jacob to impersonate Esau and steal the blessings. In the end, Jacob succeeds and receives the blessings.

One might wonder why Isaac wanted to give the blessings to Esau in the first place, when it was common knowledge that Esau was wicked while Jacob was righteous? The Talmud (Baba Batra 16b) says that on the day of his bar mitzvah (also the day his grandfather Abraham died), Esau committed the three most severe transgressions—idolatry, forbidden relations, and bloodshed. So it is difficult to imagine that his father thought him to be more worthy than his brother!

One of the answers is that Isaac knew exactly who his boytchik was, and he wanted to redeem him from his captivity to the evil inclination. He thought, perhaps, by granting Esau the blessings, he would empower him to overcome his inclinations and turn a new leaf in his life.

The lesson here is simple. Each of us has areas where we are free and others where we feel captive. Let's collaborate, support one another, have the captives in mind when you do a mitzvah, and together, we can bring Moshiach.

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