

A flame came forth from Hashem and consumed the two hundred and fifty men. (16:35)

Any believing Jew is acutely aware of the harmful effect of *machlokes*, controversy. It destroys communities, families, and individuals. It causes people to act in the most offensive and debasing manner. It “allows” them to conjure up a justification for acting with disrespect for individuals who not only deserve our respect, but whom the Torah demands that we respect. All of this is well-known. How many of us “believe” that when we cross the line of respect, regardless of how many reasons we have convinced ourselves we have, when we breach the Torah’s perimeter for *derech erez* for a *Rav*, a *Rosh Yeshivah*, a Torah personality, we will ultimately answer for it. It might take time – it might even take a lifetime, but have no illusions, the perpetrator will pay. The following story, recorded in “*Yerushalayim Shel Maalah*,” underscores this verity.

Suleiman Machluf emigrated to Yerushalayim as a young teenager and soon became a protégé of Ludwig Frankel, a secular European émigré, who had established the infamous secular Lemmel School in Yerushalayim. The founding of this school was a major breach into the spiritual panorama of Yerushalayim’s Old *Yishuv*. Heralding back to the students of the *Gaon, zl*, of Vilna and the earliest *Chassidic* and Hungarian leaders, the Old *Yishuv* was a holy center within the world’s holiest city. To entertain any form of secularism in such a spiritual milieu was an unpardonable incursion into the community’s sanctity. Sadly, this not only has not halted the secular streams from attacking the very underpinnings of our faith, it actually has encouraged them to continue their war against the Almighty.

The educational system in the Old *Yishuv* left much to be desired in the way of physical accoutrements. Poverty and hunger were a way of life for the community’s spiritually committed, hardy citizens. Nonetheless, they refused to allow any secular incursion into their way of life. There were those, however, who lacked the spiritual fortitude to ignore the blandishments offered by the secularists. As a result, the less spiritually-hardy began to send their children to the Lemmel School.

On *Sivan* 9, 1847, the Orthodox community gathered in the Churvah *shul*. Yerushalayim’s preeminent leadership graced the eastern wall of the *shul*. *Horav Yeshayah Bardaky, zl*, led the group, as fifty *Sifrei Torah* were removed from the *Aron HaKodesh* and carried by the *Rabbanim* during the recitation of the *Yud Gimmel Middos*, Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. Other *Rabbanim* held black lit candles in their hands. *Horav Yosef Landau, zl*, grandson of the *Noda B’Yehudah* and son-in-law of the *Pe’as HaShulchan*, recited the malediction against anyone who would send his child to the secular Lemmel School. At that moment, Suleiman Machluf, who was observing the proceedings in extreme anger, lost it. He grabbed the candle held by the holy *Horav Yonah Leib Mendelson, zl* (one of the premier disciples of the *Chasam Sofer*), and flung it at the *tzaddik’s* face! *Rav* Yonah’s beard caught on fire, and his face was singed, but *Baruch Hashem*, due to quick thinking on his part, he was able miraculously to prevent greater injury to himself. *Horav Raphael*

Abulafiah, zl, Rosh Yeshivah of Bais Kel, the *yeshivah* for *mekubalim*, noticed *Rav Yonah's* singed beard and, upon hearing the reason said, "I do believe with all certainty that Heaven will intervene and the perpetrator of this terrible indignity will pay *middah k'neged middah*, measure for measure."

Sixty years later... the head nurse at the Misgav Ladach Hospital was let go, based upon the trumped-up charges that her negligence was the cause of the terrible and painful death of a patient under her care. This was a righteous woman who used her earnings as a nurse to support her husband's learning in *Kollel*. Her devotion to her patients was legendary. When a tragedy occurs, however, someone must be blamed. As head nurse, she was that "someone." Apparently, an elderly patient by the name of Suleiman Machluf was admitted following the loss of his hand to a stray bullet during World War I. As a result, he was paralyzed in part of his body due to infection from the wound. (Interestingly, it was his throwing hand.)

Suleiman enjoyed reading novels written by his *Haskalah* heroes, and, as a result, he would argue with his roommate who wanted to go to sleep early. Suleiman had difficulty falling asleep; therefore, he read until he was exhausted. To help him, the head nurse set up a wooden partition, upon which she had a shelf made for the kerosene lamp to burn and illuminate the area for Suleiman, while not depriving his roommate of sleep. One night (no one was able to figure out how it happened), the lamp fell upon Suleiman. His bed clothes immediately caught fire, as well as his body. Screams of terror shattered the peace of the hospital ward. By the time that help reached Suleiman, his charred body was evidence that he had sustained a painful death. *Rav Abulafiah's* portent sadly came true. (It is important to emphasize that writing this story is by no way an expression of revenge that this person suffered. No Jew, regardless of his deeds, should suffer. Hashem metes out punishment as He sees fit. Our only purpose is to demonstrate that raising a hand or any other display of disrespect against a Torah scholar will not go unrequited.)