

## To distinguish between the contaminated and the pure, and between the creature that may be eaten and the creature that may not be eaten. (11:47)

Due to the spiritual repugnance associated with *maachalos asuros*, forbidden foods, they affect and compromise the Jewish consciousness, which is particularly sensitive to spiritual incursion. Thus, a Jew whose body has been satiated and nourished on *tarfus*, unkosher, unclean foods, lacks the spiritual finesse and ethical/moral qualities inherent to Jews who are spiritually refined. Throughout the millennia, Jews have sacrificed themselves to remain loyal to the Torah's code concerning the laws of *kashrus*, maintaining a strong degree of personal stringency in adhering to its *halachic* demands. The following episode demonstrates how a grandfather's fidelity to the laws of *kashrus* impacted the spiritual renaissance of his grandson, some sixty-years later.

The story begins during the closing days of World War II in one of Germany's infamous death camps. The Nazis realized that the end was near. They could almost smell the Soviet tanks approaching what used to be their fortress of security. The Nazis quickly began to prepare for their escape. The commandant of the camp was especially vicious in his virulent hatred of the Orthodox inmates of the camp. To be compelled to run like a frightened animal was sufficient humiliation for him, but, being relegated to run while allowing the hapless Jews to continue living was too much for him to tolerate. He could not allow them to emerge victorious from the camp. He ordered the guards to assemble all of the Jews, so that he could complete the job he had begun. He did not seem to care about his personal safety – if it meant persecuting and murdering Jews. He looked for the one Jew who had been a constant thorn in his side. **Rav Shraga Moskowitz, zl**, had already been an old man when the war broke out. Five years later, his body was aged and broken, having suffered every physical indignity to which the diabolical animals in the guise of men could subject him. He had once been a distinguished *Rosh Yeshivah* in Hungary, a beloved mentor to thousands. Even during the war he guided and inspired others, while his own meticulous observance of *mitzvos* was unwavering.

The commandant made *Rav Shraga* get down on his knees. He stood before him with a fork of unkosher meat in one hand – and a loaded gun pointed at the *Rav's* head in the other hand. With anger borne of cruelty, he screamed, "The war is over. I am sure that if you will want to return to your family, you will be able to do so. You may leave now – if you will eat this slice of meat. Otherwise, you will die right here. You have one chance – one choice. What will it be?"

*Rav Shraga* looked up at the commandant and, with a half-smile on his face, said, "Throughout my internment in this camp, I have been observant of every one of the Jewish laws of *kashrus*. At times, when stretched to the point of exhaustion, indeed, even when my life was in danger, I refused to eat non-kosher food. I will not succumb to your threats now. My allegiance to G-d is stronger than my fear of death."

The German commandant saw that he had lost the battle. The spiritual commitment of the Jewish rabbi was greater than his fear of death. The Nazi pulled the trigger, and *Rav Shraga* was martyred *al Kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying Hashem's Name in his last moments of mortal life.

The story does not end here. It continues some sixty-years later when a successful businessman was calmly sitting in his well-appointed office in downtown Tel Aviv, and the phone rang. It was his wife with a request. She was running late and did not have time to prepare dinner. Could he stop by the restaurant and pick up dinner? It was a simple request, since the restaurant was right around the corner from his office.

The man finished his day's work, locked his office and proceeded to the non-kosher restaurant which, in the past, had provided him and his wife with many dinners. He waited in line as the customers were picking up their non-kosher dinners. Suddenly, out of the blue, this man remembered the story his parents had often related, the one about his saintly grandfather who had rather taken a bullet to the head than eat non-kosher food – and here he was waiting in line to purchase non-kosher meat!

He was not alone, as the restaurant was filled with like-minded, non-practicing Jews gorging themselves with non-kosher delicacies. Something was terribly wrong – either he and all of the other customers were not normal, or his grandfather had been insane. One perspective was very, very wrong.

He left the store. Some spark of “normalcy,” an inspiration going back sixty-years to the moment when his grandfather gave up his life, took hold of him and guided him back to the observance which he had rejected earlier in life.

Everyone has a history, ancestors who in the past made the ultimate sacrifice to remain committed Torah Jews. Why do so many turn their backs on them? Sadly, when we view the future without guidance refracted through the prism of the past, the result is a myopic and jaundiced perspective.