

Sascha and the “Kremels”

by Goldie Naiditch

Years ago in Minnesota, there lived a Holocaust survivor named Sascha Breslermann (1925-1998). He was a middle-aged German Jew with a ready smile. He was immaculate, bordering on compulsive—you could eat off his garage floor! His charming German accent rendered the English language quite amusing.

Sascha lived in a modest home with his wife Ruth and their daughter Rochelle. Ruth was a slight, stoic American Jew who complemented Sascha's personality.

Sascha worked for a rental car agency at the Twin Cities airport. Every day at exactly 8:20 a.m., rain, snow or shine, Sascha would leave to get to his job on time. Ruth prepared a lunch for Sascha every morning in a brown paper bag that she placed on the kitchen table for him to take. And so, day in and day out, year in and year out, Sascha maintained a precise schedule, never deviating, except of course, on Shabbat or holidays.

As most Jews know, there is one time during the year when pressure mounts. That is Pesach, Passover. During the week before Pesach, we must finalize the cleaning, removal and sale of all leavened food items. Finally, in the last throes of the Pesach cleaning frenzy, we perform a ritual called *Bedikat Chametz*, “Searching for Leavened (flour and grain products).”

A Kabbalah tradition that became popular in 16th century Tsfat is to carefully prepare and wrap securely ten pieces of *chametz* (usually pieces of dry bread), and then hide them throughout the house.

After saying a blessing, we search silently by candlelight for *all* the chametz in the house that needs to be destroyed. When specifically the ten pieces are found, we use a feather and a wooden spoon to sweep each one into a paper bag.

Although all of this is a lot of fun (especially when children get involved), it is serious business. Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the first Chabad Rebbe, once spent nearly the whole night searching for the chametz in a small room, and simultaneously the corresponding specks of arrogance in the soul.”

The following day, the bag with the ten pieces of chametz, along with the wooden spoon, feather and candle, are burned in another ceremony called “*Biur Chametz*.” The chametz must be burned completely before the official time designated for each city.¹ This, then, is the final “curtain” for the chametz.

¹ 5/12 of the time from sunset to sunrise according to Rabbi Shneur Zalman and the Vilna Gaon, but from dawn to nightfall according to a number of other authorities which results in an earlier deadline.

On the day before Pesach, Sascha's home was even cleaner than usual, if that was possible. Ruth placed the brown paper bag containing the chametz on the kitchen table, which she would bring to a communal Biur Chametz ceremony on behalf of the family.

That morning, two brown paper lunch bags stood at attention on the kitchen table. Each was folded three times to form a slight handle. Each bag awaited its destiny.

Sascha checked his watch, as he had done at least 10 times since waking, to see that he was on his precise schedule. His last task before leaving work was to get his lunch and car keys and leave the house. He entered the kitchen, and, without taking note of anything unusual, Sascha took a brown bag from the kitchen table and drove off to work.

Sascha parked his car in the employee lot outside the airport. He took his usual path to punch his timecard. On the way, he greeted his friend and co-worker, Jerry.

“How's it goin' Saycha?” Jerry just couldn't get Sascha's name right.

“Gut, gut,” replied Sasha, giving him a toothy, friendly smile. As he made his way near his office, his stomach growled. He was hungry; on the day before Pesach, there's wasn't too much to eat in the house. Sascha looked in his lunch bag, and to his chagrin, there were only crumbs, “kremels,” in Sascha's unique vocabulary. He immediately tossed the bag into the big green dumpster, and entered his office building.

Meanwhile, Ruth was getting ready to join the community in the group burning of the chametz, which was the last ritual to divest oneself of all chametz. After putting on her jacket, Ruth went to the kitchen table and took the remaining brown paper bag. Much to her horror, there were no chametz pieces inside, only Sascha's lunch!

Time was of the essence! The crumbs had to be burned within an hour. Ruth quickly called her husband's cellphone. “Sascha, it must be that you took the chametz!”

“Vat are you meaning?”

“The chametz,” Ruth said, “from the Search last night. It was on the kitchen table, in a brown bag.”

Sascha's face turned pale. He had immediate recognition—life had thrown him a brown paper curveball.

“Sascha, Sascha, are you there?”

“Ya, ya.”

“Sascha, you have to bring the chametz back home so I can burn it. We only have a little time left.”

“Ya, ya, chametz, you mean the *kremels*,” said Sascha, “I bring zem, I bring the kremels.”

Sascha immediately went to survey the big green dumpster. It was 10 feet high. Sascha rolled up his sleeves. He looked to the right and to the left. Luckily, no one was around. He focused on the top rim of the dumpster. He scrambled up on top of the adjoining ledge and barely managed to latch onto the rim. Then, after two tries, he succeeded to hoist himself up to the top and jumped in!

Sascha looked around him, feeling like Jonah in the whale. Fortunately, the dumpster was not full. Sascha gingerly started to look for the bag with the “kremels.” There weren't too many brown bags, especially those that were folded quite neatly. After poking and searching around, he found the bag, and yes, the “kremels” were intact.

Immediately Sascha was faced with a big problem; well, actually, two: how to get out of the dumpster, and what to tell the person who would help him out. Sascha took his cell phone and called Jerry.

“Jerry, I need your help.”

“What do you need, Saycha?”

“Vell, I'm in the dumpster nearest to the building and I can't get out.”

There was a long pause on the other end of the phone.

“Saycha, you say you are in a dumpster?”

“Ya, can you help me get out?”

“OK, this oughta be a good one!”

Jerry went to get a ladder and brought it to the dumpster. He climbed up and saw Sascha. “You are in there, alright!”

As he grabbed Sascha's hands and hoisted him out of the dumpster, he asked, “Now Saycha, you gotta tell me what made you get into this dumpster in the first place.”

“Da vife, she left her watch in the paper bag, and called to tell me to go get it.”

“She left her watch in your lunch bag! Incredible, what wives don't think of!”

Sascha raced home with the “kremels.” Ruth finished burning the chametz, and Passover started on time that night. And Sascha, well, he started a new habit: each morning checking to make sure his lunch was in the bag, and not the “kremels.”

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*Source:* Adapted and expanded by Yerachmiel Tilles from the mailing, “Shabbos Stories for Yom Tov Pesach 5774.” Originally posted on //chabad.org.

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