

A Noose in Time

Reb Yosef Palloch, who passed away in 2009, was a special dedicated Jew who lived in Northern Tel Aviv, an area with many irreligious Jewish residents. Reb Yosef wanted to draw them closer to Torah Judaism, so he launched an organization called *Niflaos Yisrael*, arranged a property, and went there every day to give a Talmud class.

For him it was a firm commitment in time and soul, which he never abandoned. One thunderously rainy day he debated with himself whether he should go to give his class. Finally he decided: "I have a commitment; I must go."

He went, and found only one Jew waiting to participate in his class.

"One person isn't enough," Reb Yosef declared. "My commitment is to give a *public* class. We need at least one more person to join us."

He went outside, and asked the first person he met whether he wanted to come inside to partake of a Talmud class. The person just looked at him in shock, and continued on his way.

The second person he asked didn't even stop to listen to what Reb Yosef was saying. He just continued on his way without paying any attention to him.

The third person offered some advice: "Don't you realize that no one will go to your class? You may as well give up."

But Reb Yosef didn't give up. He went to the house across the street and knocked at the door. No one answered.

Reb Yosef crossed back to his side of the street, and resumed asking every passerby to join his class. He didn't succeed to recruit anyone this time either, so he went once again to the house across the street. This time, he knocked harder at the door.

The door opened, and Reb Yosef found himself facing a very large person. He was wide and he was tall, and his long hair was flowing down his back. To a fragile, studious person like Yosef Palloch, the huge man appeared frightening.

"Would you like to join us? There is a Torah class going on."

"Who sent you here?" the big man asked.

Reb Yosef simply repeated his request, word for word: "Would you like to join us? There is a Torah class going on."

"Who sent you here?" the big man demanded again, louder this time.

Reb Yosef ignored the question, instead repeating his request a third time. The big person's reaction was to grab him by the lapels, drag him inside his home, and lock the door. "I am giving you three minutes to explain to me who sent you here," he said menacingly

Reb Yosef was frightened, and wasn't at all sure what he could say. Deciding truth was the best option, he told him that he was looking for someone to join him in a Torah class.

The big man led Reb Yosef deeper into his home, and showed him a rope hanging from the ceiling. Reb Yosef considered what this rope might imply, and he began to say *viduy* ([pre-death] confession) under his breath to himself.

“I’ve lived in this home, alone, for the past forty years,” this big man explained. “My parents and I don’t get along, and I haven’t spoken to them all this time. I never married. I am totally alone. For the past forty years no one even knocked at my door. I felt I couldn’t take it anymore, so I decided to end my life.

“For the last two hours, I was pacing in my home, crying out: ‘Al-mighty G-d, if you exist, show me a sign of life.’ Otherwise, I shall commit suicide. Show me that you are there, and care for me, or I will end my lonely life.”

“I repeated this prayer for two hours. I didn’t receive a response from Heaven, so I placed the rope around my neck. This is when you knocked on the door for the first time. It was a sign from heaven – a sign of life.

“I took off the noose and went to the door, but apparently you’d already left. I decided that I imagined the knocking, so I returned to the rope, this time tightening it seriously.

“Right then, you knocked at my door a second time, loudly. I removed the noose again and came out to open the door, and there you were, asking me to join your Torah class.”

Without a word, the huge man followed Rabbi Palloch across the street to *Niflaos Yisrael*. It did not take long after that for him to become a complete *baal teshuvah* (returnee [to *mitzvah* observance])

During the *shivah* (week [of mourning at home] for Reb Yosef, this big man came to visit. He told this story, and that is how we know it.

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**Rabbi Biderman adds:** What does this story tell us? It is a reminder of the importance of unbreakable commitment to one’s set times for Torah study. Rain or snow, without fail, one should continue. Look how much was gained from Reb Yosef’s adherence to his Torah class!

Full commitment will require *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice) to keep to it. Because when a commitment is continuous, something will inevitably come up. One must train oneself to put everything aside and keep his set time for Torah study. Even if it is to study Torah for five minutes in the day and five minutes at night, it is a greater level than someone who studies Torah all day long but without a commitment to do it at the same hour and every day.