

bs"D

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles** <[editor@ascentofsafed.com](mailto:editor@ascentofsafed.com)>

**Story #1319** (5783-26) 27 Adar 5783 (March 20, 2023)

**Discover!** the "*TillesTells Saturday Night Stories*" [WhatsApp group](#)

## ***The Death Camp Matzah Squad***

In the days preceding Passover, the war was nearing its end. The relentless droning of American aircraft filled the German skies, followed by the whistling hail of bombs that pounded the Mühldorf railway complex into rubble.

Spared of destruction were the nearby forced labor camps where we toiled under the harshest conditions. We prisoners celebrated this mighty display of Allied destruction, but the anxiety of our German overseers ran high. The railway was vital to the war efforts, and orders were issued to immediately repair the damage. The Germans decided to send a group of 12 Jewish slaves to begin the cleanup.

I [Moshe Goldstein] volunteered to go. I knew the work would be excruciating but I hoped that perhaps I would find some food amidst the rubble.

We arrived at a scene of utter devastation. Freight cars lay on their sides, smoke rising from gaping holes. Stretches of railing were ripped off the ground and tossed aside in twisted heaps. Nearly every building suffered extensive damage. It was clear some of the cars were unrepairable.

I managed to disappear between the rows of trains that were still upright. It took a while, but I eventually found a boxcar from Hungary loaded with wheat in burlap sacks. Wheat! And so close to Pesach! G-d had granted us a good start, but how could I possibly smuggle the wheat into the camp?

A faint groan from amid the wheat sacks caught my attention. There, in a dark corner of the boxcar, lay a man, crushed by the enormous weight of the grain. The man mumbled something more, which I recognized as Hungarian, my native tongue. I saw he wore the gray uniform of an SS officer.

"What happened?" I asked.

The SS officer moaned weakly about being pinned under the sacks.

"I understand. Let me help you."

As I approached, I noticed the officer's boots, deep black in color and luxurious in appearance. On my own were bits of tattered leather, barely held together.

“I’m going to take off your shoes,” I said. “That way, you’ll feel less restrained, and then we’ll see what we can do.”

Once I had undone the laces, I slipped the heavy boots off. Then, wielding whatever strength and hate I could muster, I swung at the man’s head. I took the boots and continued my search.

I knew I did not have much time and I needed to think of a way to bring in as much wheat as possible without the guards knowing. Lugging the sacks through the main gates didn’t even occur to me; the wheat would be confiscated and I would be shot without a second thought.

I rummaged around some more, and discovered two pairs of pants. I put them on and cinched the bottoms around my ankles with some rope. I was then able to pour a small quantity of wheat into the space between the two pairs of pants. Once my legs were filled with as much wheat as I dared carry, I began the long walk back to the camp.

The bombings left the Germans rattled and fearful, and for the initial days following the air raid, the inspection of prisoners at camp gates was enforced almost half-heartedly. I was thus able to smuggle in a fairly large amount of wheat.

We had wheat, but now what?

Reb **Sender Direnfeld**, a fellow inmate and a Belzer Chassid, offered to hide the wheat, and amazingly, he managed to keep it away from prying German eyes.

Later, an old mill was procured from somewhere. The three of us -- **Reb Yekusiel Halberstam** (the Klausenburger Rebbe), **Yaakov Friedman** and I (**Moshe Goldstein**) -- ground the wheat in the dead of night, and using a clean piece of cloth, sifted the flour from grit.

Next we needed fuel for a fire.

During one stint in the field, I asked everyone to find a stick and carry it back to the camp. The branches were conspicuous and caught the attention of a German guard. He motioned me over.

“Why is everyone with a stick?”

“What difference does it make? People want to walk around with a stick,” I answered.

We had flour and we had fuel. We were ready to bake matzah.

One night just before Passover, we set about baking matzah. Near the barrack door stood a prisoner, standing guard with fearful eyes.

We lit a fire under a metal can which functioned as our oven, and the matzah baking—under Nazi noses—began. We three mixed the flour and kneaded the dough. We worked quickly, not only because of the strict 18-minute limit, but also because of the ever-present danger of being caught. We ended up with 20 small matzahs.

On Pesach eve, after returning from work, our small group sat down for the Seder. On wooden slats around us lay sleeping bodies, exhausted from the relentless work. For those celebrating, the hardships of the Holocaust and daily camp life melted away as we experienced the Biblical redemption from Egypt. Unable to sit for long, we each ate an olive-sized piece of matzah, the taste of tears mingling with the matzah crumbs in our mouths.

We could not sit leisurely and recite the Haggadah, but in those moments we each prayed—more fervently than ever before or ever since—the words that still ring in my ears: “*Next year in Jerusalem.*”

~~~~~

Source: Edited by Yerachmiel Tilles from a report by **Asharon Baltazar** on *Chabad.org*, based on and translated from Yaakov Friedman's memoirs, *Tiferet Yaakov* (Hebrew), written by his son-in-law, Rabbi Sholom Horowitz.

*Biographical note:* **Rabbi Yekusiel-Yehudah Halberstam** [10 Shvat 5665 – **Shabbat**, [(January 10, 1905 – June 18, 1994) **9 Tammuz 5754**, the same week as the Lubavitcher Rebbe's passing)], the **Klausenberger** Rebbe, was a Holocaust survivor who also became the post-war Rebbe of the **Sanz** Chassidim. One of the foremost Chasidic leaders of his generation, he is best known for his revitalization of the study of Talmud through "*Mifal HaShas*" and the building of a hospital, Laniado, in Netanya, that functions at the highest standards of Jewish law and medical practice.



*Connection:* Preparing for Passover