

Choose Life!

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Toras Avigdor Junior

Adapted from the teachings of Rav Avigdor Miller zt"l

The Jerusalem Prison is not generally a place where one would go to find friendly faces. It is not fun to be in prison and most prisoners are constantly wishing they could be living free lives outside of the prison walls.

This morning seemed like a particularly sad day. Just about everyone seemed dispirited, dragging their feet as they went about their daily chores.

A group of prisoners were in the kitchen, preparing lunch, when the door opened.

"Kavod harav!" exclaimed Tzadok "Hatzadik". "Didn't you just do a kashrut inspection an hour ago?"

"I'm not here for a kashrus inspection," Rav Volender replied. "I am here to do something about how unhappy everyone is."

"But everyone is happy," Tzadok said. "I made everyone in the prison a happiness segulah."

"Is that so?" Rav Volender said, as he opened a large sack of carrots onto the stainless steel countertop.

"Oh yes, it's been in my family for half-a-generation," Tzadok bragged. "You just take a potato peel, wrap it around a raw olive, tie it with a red string, and wear it around your neck."

Rav Volender looked around at the prisoners who indeed all seemed to be wearing this strange "segulah".

"Well then, why does everyone still look so sad?" he asked, as he started chopping the carrots.

"The happiness is on the inside," Tzadok said. "Right, Boris?"

The prisoner standing next to Tzadok scowled. "It itches," he grunted.



“Well I think I have a better solution which will make everyone happy on the inside and the outside,” said Rav Volender, tilting the chopped carrots into a big pot, and starting to slice celery.

“Better than my potato peels and olives?” Tzadok asked skeptically. “What could be better than that?”

“I’m going to make ‘happiness soup,’” Rav Volender explained. “Would you like to help me?”

“**Happiness soup???**” Tzadok said excitedly. “A *segulah* you can eat? I’d love to help!”

Tzadok spent the next twenty minutes helping Rav Volender make a huge pot of soup which was soon simmering away on the stove.

“Ahhhh,” Tzadok said, inhaling the steam from the pot. “I can feel it working already!”

“Tzadok,” said Rav Volender. “It won’t work until we add the secret ingredient.”

“Secret ingredient?” Tzadok whispered eagerly. “Where is it? Can I see it?”

“You actually can’t see the secret ingredient,” Rav Volender answered.

“Ooooh an *invisible* secret ingredient! Even better! You know, I have a whole box of invisible secret ingredients. I can lend you them if you want.”

“No need, Tzadok,” said Rav Volender, heading to the door. “We will add the secret ingredient when we eat the soup. I’ll see you at lunchtime!”

* * *

Rav Volender walked into the crowded prison dining room. Hungry prisoners sat waiting in front of steaming bowls of soup.

“Kavod *harav!*” Tzadok called out. “I told everyone they had to wait until you came. Do you have the secret ingredient?”

“I do,” Rav Volender replied, sitting down at one of the tables. “Okay everyone, before we eat, let’s think

about how lucky we are to be Yidden. Hashem gives us the constant opportunity to choose life: “וּבְחֵרָתָ בְּחַיִּים”. For example, right now we can either eat like animals or to take a minute and think about Who gives us our food. Then, we have another choice: do we shove this soup into our mouths, or do we first make a *brocha* to thank Hashem for this delicious meal?”

Rav Volender led the prisoners in a loud “*shehakol nihyeh bidvaro*” and everyone sipped a spoonful of soup.

“Now, as Tzadok probably already told you, this is ‘happiness soup’. Before each spoonful, we have to think of an opportunity to ‘choose life’. All day long we can choose to do what Hashem wants or, *chas veshalom*, to do otherwise. By choosing His will, we choose life, both a better life in this world, as well as the next.

“Remember, *mitzvos* are more valuable than gold and precious stones. Would any of you choose to walk past a diamond on the street without picking it up? A single *mitzvah* is like millions of diamonds! So before each spoonful, I want all of you to think about another diamond that Hashem gives you the opportunity to choose. Tell it to the person next to you and then enjoy another spoonful of soup.”

The prisoners began discussing the many opportunities Hashem gives us to choose life as they ate the delicious lunch. Soon, smiles began to appear on their faces as they realized the tremendous opportunities Hashem is constantly giving them.

“Kavod *harav!*” called Tzadok urgently, as lunchtime ended and Rav Volender got up to leave. “You forgot the secret ingredient!”

“No, Tzadok, I did not.” Rav Volender said with a smile. “We all added the secret ingredient as we ate.”

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

let’s review:

- What was the secret ingredient in the “happiness soup”?
- What are some opportunities we have to choose life?



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