SHABBAT UNPACKED

OLAMI MENTORSHIP

Session 15

You've Unpacked Shabbat!

BURST OF INSPIRATION

From “All for the Boss” –
The Story of R’ Yaakov Yosef Herman zt”l by Ruchoma Shain

On August 16, 1939 Father and Mother set out on their journey to the Land of Israel. Their ship was scheduled to dock in Haifa on Wednesday, August 30. Arrangements had been made for them to stay with Rabbi Alpha and his wife in Haifa, where their son Avrumi lived.

But in the middle of the sea, the captain received urgent orders to divert the ship’s route—mines were being laid in the Mediterranean. War was imminent.

Instead of arriving on Wednesday, the ship docked in Haifa on Friday, September 1, just one hour before sunset. Just hours earlier, World War II had officially broken out, with Germany’s invasion of Poland.

Loudspeakers ordered all passengers to immediately disembark. The port was in chaos. Cargo would be dumped on the dock, and passengers were responsible for retrieving it as fast as possible.

Father and Mother stood there, distressed and confused.

How could they handle all their luggage and still leave the port in time to reach Rabbi Alpha’s home before Shabbat? Father grabbed the suitcase containing his personal Torah scroll, tallit, and tefillin. Mother took only her handbag. They pushed through the crowd and asked to speak with the officer in charge.

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A tall British officer listened to Father's quiet, heartfelt plea:

"I have never violated Shabbat. To arrive in Eretz Yisrael and desecrate Shabbat here—that is unthinkable."

Tears streamed down Father's face.

The officer responded sharply:

"Rabbi, war has begun! You must be realistic."

Still, Father begged:

"Please just stamp our passports. We'll collect our belongings after Shabbat."

"Impossible," said the officer. "The ship must be cleared, and the dock too. No baggage can remain behind."

"I don't care about our possessions. Just please stamp the passports. Let us leave."

The officer looked at Father strangely.

"How much luggage do you have?"

"Sixteen crates in the hold and nine suitcases in the cabin."

BURST OF INSPIRATION

“Do you understand that once you leave, your things will be left here, unattended? By tomorrow night, nothing will be left. The Arabs will loot everything.”

“I have no choice,” Father said. “Shabbat is almost here. Please, just let us go.”

The officer stared for a moment, then called over another British officer.

“Stamp their passports. Let them go. This rabbi is prepared to lose everything—just so he can keep his Sabbath.”

The second officer was stunned, but he did as asked.

And so, Father holding his sacred Torah and Mother holding her purse, they hailed a cab and arrived at the Alpha home just in time to light Shabbat candles.

Throughout Shabbat, Father was uplifted with joy.

Again and again, he said to Mother, “The Boss (The Almighty) does everything for me. What can I ever do in return? Finally, I had the merit to fulfill ‘בכל מאודך’—to give everything for His name.”

Mother, though supportive, found it harder to feel his elation. She was physically exhausted, emotionally drained, longing for her children, and mourning the loss of everything they owned. But she did not complain.

BURST OF INSPIRATION

Then, on Saturday night, after Havdalah, Rabbi Alpha said:

"Let's go down to the port. Perhaps some of your crates are still there."

Father and Mother were not hopeful, but they followed him.
As they neared the floodlit port area, a voice called out in a thick British accent:

"Who goes there?"

"I'm a passenger from the ship that docked yesterday afternoon," Father replied.

"What's your name?" asked the soldier.

"Yaakov Y. Herman."

The guard's face lit up.

"Ah! It's about time you showed up. I was told you'd come the moment Shabbat ended—otherwise I'd have waited for hours more. I've personally guarded your cargo for over 24 hours. My commanding officer threatened to have my head if so much as one item went missing. Please check that everything's in order and sign here. And take it all as fast as possible—I'm completely exhausted."

Sometimes, keeping Shabbat means more than just rest. Sometimes it's a choice that costs everything—and returns even more. In a world spiraling into war and chaos, one Jewish man had arrived in the Holy Land and presented The Creator the greatest welcome gift: his possessions, his trust, and his unwavering commitment to Shabbat.

DEAR SHABBAT UNPACKED PARTICIPANTS

We hope that the last 14 sessions have helped you unpack the spirit and scope of Shabbat.

Each day in our morning prayers we request “Almighty, enlighten our eyes with Your Torah, and let our hearts cling to Your mitzvot...” The full experience and impact of a Torah way of life encompasses learning Torah and performing mitzvot.

Yet we don't suffice ourselves with merely the intellectual pursuit of Torah study and the practical performance of mitzvot.

We ask for something much loftier!

We ask that Torah study enlighten our eyes and open us up to seeing a depth and beauty in the world that we were unable to previously see. We also ask the Almighty to enable us to experience a personal and emotional connection to mitzvah performance.

Perhaps nowhere in Jewish life is this request more meaningful than in respect to Shabbat observance.

Learning about the themes and practicalities of Shabbat and then trying to make them part of our life is in itself a lofty pursuit, but attempting to open our eyes and hearts to understanding the depth and beauty of Shabbat and subsequently being spiritually elevated in the process is priceless!

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