

My Secret School Life in Samarkand

Sunday: The Weirdest Rules Ever

Okay, so my name is Hillel and I'm going to tell you about when I was a kid in this place called Samarkand. It was basically the WEIRDEST time ever.

Get this - the government (those are the people who make the rules) decided that kids weren't allowed to learn about Yiddishkeit. Like, AT ALL. Can you imagine if someone told you that you couldn't learn Torah or keep mitzvos? That's just crazy, right?

But here's the thing - our parents didn't care about those dumb rules. They were like secret agents or something. Except instead of fighting bad guys, they were secretly teaching us Torah.

Monday: Mr. Daniel Tells Us Everything

So this old guy named Daniel came over to our house today.

He looked pretty sad, like when you accidentally step on your little brother's toy and feel really bad about it.

My tatty made him some tea (adults LOVE tea for some reason) and then Daniel started talking.

"KIDS," HE SAID, "I USED TO WORK FOR THE GOVERNMENT. I TOLD PARENTS TO SEND THEIR KIDS TO THE NEW SCHOOLS."

I was like, "That doesn't sound so bad."

But then he explained the whole thing. The government totally TRICKED the parents! They said, "Sure, pick your own teachers." But then they secretly switched all the teachers with their own people. That's like if your mommy said you could pick what's for dinner, but then she secretly replaced your fleishigs with treif. NOT COOL.

The worst part? Daniel told us about these super brave kids who wouldn't eat the non-kosher food at school. They just kept their mouths shut tight. No matter what. Those kids

were like tiny tzaddikim, if you ask me.

Daniel felt really bad about all this stuff. I guess that's what happens when you realize you were on the wrong team.

Tuesday Night: Our Living Room Becomes Awesome

After Daniel left yesterday, my parents got this look. You know the look - like when parents are planning something and they think you don't notice. But I TOTALLY noticed.

Tonight, things got interesting.

First, Tatty closed all the curtains. Like, REALLY closed them.

Then Mommy checked the hallway about a million times.

I was thinking, "What is going ON here?"

Then Tatty pulled out this really old sefer. It smelled like my zeidy's house - you know, that old sefer smell? And he

whispered (WHISPERED!), "Tonight, we learn."

And just like that, our boring living room turned into a
SECRET CHER. How cool is that?

Sometimes other kids would sneak over too. We had to be
super quiet because if the neighbors found out, we'd be in
BIG trouble. It was scary but also kind of exciting. Like
being in a secret club, but for learning Torah.

We learned alef-beis and stories about the Avos and
niggunim. Mommy taught us melodies that her mother taught
her, which her mother taught HER. It was like this chain of
Yiddishe mames teaching kids forever and ever.

Wednesday: The Scary Guy at the Shul

There was only ONE shul left open in our whole city. ONE!
There used to be tons of them, but the government closed
them all down except this one.

And there was this guy there named Chaim who gave everyone

the creeps.

Whenever visitors came, he'd run up to them super fast and be like, "HI! IM CHAIM! IM IN CHARGE HERE! EVERYTHING IS GREAT!"

But here's the really scary part - my zeidy told me the truth. Chaim was working for the government. He wrote down the names of everyone who came to daven and gave the list to the police. That's why lots of people stayed away - they knew Chaim would report them and they'd lose their jobs. Or worse.

It was like having a spy right in the shul. A spy who pretended to be your friend but was actually dangerous.

But you know what? The old people like my zeidy still went. He said, "When you're my age, you stop being afraid of their threats and start caring about what really matters."

Zeidy was pretty brave.

Thursday: Parent Power

Here's something crazy - EVERY parent became a melamed. They HAD to, because there were no yeshivos allowed.

My tatty would come home super tired from work, but he'd still teach me for half an hour every day. EVERY. SINGLE. DAY. Even when he probably wanted to just rest!

"This is more important than anything else," he'd say.

I didn't get it then, but I do now. It's like if learning Torah was banned and your parents had to secretly teach you. Oh wait, that's EXACTLY what happened!

Some families had secret melamdin visit. We all had to pretend we didn't know about it. It was like this big secret everyone was in on, but nobody talked about.

The coolest part? There were actual SECRET YESHIVOS. Like, hidden yeshivos where kids could learn together. Parents would whisper about where they were. It was like something

out of a story, except it was real life.

Motzei Shabbos: What I Figured Out

So here's what I learned from all this craziness:

- Sometimes grown-ups make really dumb rules
- Parents will do ANYTHING to give their kids a Torah education
- Kids can be way braver than anyone thinks
- Keeping mitzvos secret is better than not keeping them at all

Every time we lit Shabbos candles in secret, every time we learned a new letter of the alef-beis, every time someone kept kosher even when it was hard - that was us winning. We were like quiet soldiers in Hashem's army, keeping Yiddishkeit alive.

And you know what the best part is? We DID IT. We kept learning, we kept our traditions, and we didn't let anyone stop us.

Take that, weird government rules!

THE END

(Okay, not really the end, because there's way more to the story. But this is enough for now. My hand is tired from writing.)