



From the Apple in the Holocaust to Space

Holocaust survivor Dr. Avraham Peter passed away this week, two months before his 100th birthday. Most of us never heard of him during his lifetime, and many may not have heard of him even after his passing. That's a shame. Here is a small attempt to correct that.

As a senior engineer, Dr. Peter helped establish the Israeli Air Force in the early years of the state. He then went on to an international scientific career in the field of astrophysics. Here is just one remarkable achievement: for years he worked at NASA.

During the Apollo 13 crisis, he was called into the American space agency's situation room. The spacecraft had launched toward the moon, but an explosion in an oxygen tank threatened the lives of the astronauts.

Operating with complete composure, Peter improvised complex and creative engineering solutions, and ultimately the astronauts returned safely to Earth.

When the media asked him about those moments, he always returned to one small story, which he told countless times throughout his life. In all his lectures and articles, he said those moments shaped him and gave him strength:

Peter was born in Poland. His family was sent to the Lodz Ghetto, to years of harsh hunger, illness, and forced labor. One day, young Avraham was sent to work beyond the ghetto walls, and at enormous risk managed to obtain an apple. Had he been caught, the punishment would have of course been immediate death. He hid the apple, managed to get it

past the strict guards, and brought it to his father inside the camp.

His father had not seen fresh fruit in years. He was sick and weak. When his son handed him the apple, tears streamed from his eyes.

But here comes the life-changing moment: instead of rushing to eat the apple out of an almost inhuman hunger, young Avraham was moved to see his father holding the apple in his hand, lifting it upward and

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reciting slowly and aloud the blessing over fruit: “Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the tree.” Then he added the “*Shehecheyanu*” blessing: “Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and brought us to this moment.”

Young Avraham was stunned. His father had not lunged at the apple but had paused to give thanks, to bless, to give this moment Jewish meaning. Then he took a bite of the apple — and shared the pieces among the family.

“That made me a proud Jew,” his son said.

“It made me understand that it is not our instincts that lead us. I saw my father rise above everything, and that was the spiritual anchor that accompanied me all my life. Father died in the ghetto, like most of the



family. But I survived, and the memory of him reciting the blessing over the apple gave me the resilience to succeed. I understood that even under extreme pressure, even in scarcity, even in the ghetto and even in NASA’s situation room — you can be in control, you can function. We are much more than a body; we are a soul.

My father thanked God for an apple, and I was privileged to explore the wonders of creation in depth, to dive into the world of science, and to see the Creator there too — just as in the apple.”

For more than eighty years, that apple gave strength to Dr. Peter. Last week he was laid to rest in Jerusalem. ■

Sivan Rahav-Meir is a media personality and lecturer. Married to Yedidya, the mother of five. Lives in Jerusalem, and formerly served as the World Mizrahi Shlichah to North America. Sivan lectures in Israel and overseas about the media, Judaism, Zionism and new media. She was voted by Globes newspaper as most popular female media personality in Israel and by the Jerusalem Post as one of the 50 most influential Jews in the world.

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