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## The Split Picture

R' Yehoshua Zitron shared an emotional story with a heartwarming sentiment.

*Before the Holocaust, in Europe, there was a certain Jewish couple that was the ultimate pair. Everyone around them knew that these two were destined for each other. Both the guy and the girl were unbelievable in middot, and the bond these two lovebirds shared in marriage was stronger than anything. While most people's infatuated "honeymoon phase" usually lasts up to a year at most, this couple was still in their infatuation stage after two years of being married to each other. They really were a beautiful couple...*

*Two years after their wedding, word got out that the Nazis were coming, destroying town after town. It was the early 1940s, and the townspeople knew of the imminent danger. Many Jews tried getting ahold of visas so they could escape, but it wasn't so easy, and the clock was ticking. This newlywed, Abe, tried securing visas for both himself and his wife, Sarah, but could only obtain one for her. He wasn't able to get a visa for himself. The word on the street was that the Nazis were going to infiltrate their town in two days; if people didn't leave right away, it would be too late. That evening, Abe came home and explained the situation to his wife. "You must go to America," he pleaded with her. She insisted that she wasn't going anywhere without him. "I need you to go," he begged. "You have an aunt in Los Angeles, I want you to go there." "Not going to happen," she said, matter-of-factly. "I'm not leaving you. Period." For hours, this went back and forth. "How am I going to live with myself if something happens to you, G-d forbid..." he argued. "I can't separate from you," she countered. Hours later, he saw this wasn't going anywhere, so the next morning, he went out to buy a train ticket. He came back home, and without telling her anything, he packed up her bags. She noticed what was happening, and confronted him, "What do you think you're doing?" "I'm taking you to the train." Again, he was met with much resistance. He put the bags down and looked his wife in the eyes, "My love, I love you more than anything. I'm begging you! I cannot and will not be able to live with myself knowing something happened to you because of me. Please, go for my sake; and I'll be right behind you. I'm working on securing a visa for myself; hopefully I should have it in a few days. Please, I'll be right behind you..." Sarah's eyes swelled up with tears. She realized that he was right, but didn't want to leave him. As he finished packing, she sat paralyzed on the couch, bawling. Just then, an idea struck Abe. He took out their wedding picture and handed it to her. "Take this picture with you, and when you get to LA, hang it up on the wall by your aunt's house, so you'll be able to remember me, and it'll be like we're together the whole time." She took the picture and ripped it in half. The cut was right between him and her; she gave him the photo of her, and kept for herself the picture of him. "When you come to me, we're going to reattach this picture and put it up together in our own house..." "Fair deal," he smiled, and put the photo of her in his pocket. Finally, they made their way out to the train station, and gave each other their final goodbyes. As she boarded, she begged once again, "Please, don't leave me for long. I can't be here to live without you." He promised her that he'll be reunited with her as soon as he possibly can, and with that, the train took off. Abe returned and worked tirelessly to try obtaining a visa. Time was ticking; the Nazis were said to invade at any moment. Before Abe could get his hands on a visa, the town was full of gunshots and screaming. The Nazis arrived. It was too late. Abe knew he couldn't take any luggage with him, so he sewed a secret compartment in his coat and hid his picture there. Before he knew it, he was whisked away by the Germans and sent to a concentration camp. There, he saw things he would never have imagined in his life. He witnessed children murdered before their parents; parents slaughtered in front of their children; people being forced to literally dig their own graves, only to be shot inside; people forced to watch their wives and children get shot in graves that they had dug with their own hands, and sent back to the barracks to live with that. People would rather have died than live through what they had gone through in those purgatories. Each person had something to keep them going, and for Abe, that was the picture that he had smuggled. Every night, he would take out the picture and even talk to it. His bunkmates assumed he had gone mad, as he would have full-on conversations with the picture. "I'll see you soon, I miss you; I love you so much," he would say to it one day. "Today was a really tough day..." he would continue conversing with it the next night. Throughout the nights, he would pour out his soul to the picture, and that infused him with enough motivation to survive each torturous day.*

*Three years went on this way. He had seen his family and closest friends die right in front of him. One day, as it was particularly hot outside and the Jews had been working the fields, rumors spread of the American soldiers liberating the camps. The inmates had a new spark of hope, and the day went by faster. Due to the heat, they had their coats piled up in the corner, and after the day's work had ended and the Jews were halfway through their march back to the camps, Abe had realized that he had forgotten his coat at the work-fields. He started having a mental breakdown, because the picture was in that coat! His fellow inmates tried calming him down, but he was practically twitching with anxiety. He couldn't run out of line; the Nazis would shoot him down. He was forced to follow everyone back to the bunk. But Abe couldn't fall asleep. He was a nervous wreck the entire time; he needed the picture to talk to! He attempted to sneak out, but his bunkmates refused to allow it. "We're being freed soon! Forget the picture! Stay alive so you can go back to your wife in person!" One fellow ran and blocked the door with his body. "Listen Abe," he exclaimed. "Over my dead body are you stepping foot over this threshold! I lost enough family already! You guys are all I have left! I'm not losing another brother!" (Continued on Next Side)*

(Continued From Front Side): Abe saw he couldn't get anywhere, and finally gave in. All the bunkmates went to sleep, passing out instantly from the exhaustion of the day's immense workload, but Abe just lay there, wide awake. He tried with all his might to fall asleep, but he just couldn't – not without performing his nightly ritual of speaking to the picture of his wife. After two hours of tossing and turning, he couldn't take it anymore, and he snuck out of the bunk. After checking to ensure the coast was clear, he escaped through the back window and lurked in the shadows to make sure a Nazi wouldn't catch him. Every time he saw a German officer, he would hide in his position for half an hour, and only after being certain that he was gone, he moved from behind one camp to the next. The should-have-been half hour walk took Abe two hours. Suddenly, he heard a truck driving down the main road, and saw lights flashing. "Odd," he thought. "It's around 2 am; what's going on?" In complete nervousness, he hid for another half hour, and slowly made his way to the big pile and retrieved his coat. He breathed a sigh of relief, comforted that he got his "wife" back. Abe worked his way back to the bunk, and as he approached the vicinity, he heard loud shrieking and screaming. His heart started to pound even harder. He continued making his way back to his own camp and as he peaked into the window, he froze. The lights were on. It was only 4 am; the lights were never on this early. Suddenly, thoughts of guilt flooded his sleep-deprived brain. He waited a bit, but didn't hear any commotion, so he walked around the bunk to enter through the front entrance. He took one glance and immediately turned pale and fell to the ground; his body was shaking and tears burst forth uncontrollably. The bunk was stained with blood everywhere; all his bunkmates were murdered. "I killed my brothers... I killed my brothers... I killed my brothers..." Abe sobbed, shaking on the floor back and forth with intense trauma. He had thought that the Nazis had done a random head count in the middle of the night, and killed everyone in the bunk when they noticed one was missing and none of them wanted to reveal his whereabouts. As he cried and cried, he turned the other way and noticed that the next bunk's lights were on, too. He crawled to the next bunk and saw the same thing there, as well. It then dawned upon him what had happened. This was the Germans' last attempt to eradicate any Jew they could before the imminent liberation. He felt somewhat relieved that they hadn't died on his account, but now, not knowing what to do, he went back to his bunk and tore his clothing. Tears streaming down his face, he apologized to his dead brothers as he smeared their blood all over his body, in attempt to blend in if the Nazis would come back. After minutes of intense crying, Abe passed out. Around half an hour later, as the sun was rising, he woke up to the sound of a truck pulling up and indistinct voices. The truck came to transport all the bodies for mass burial, and the best thing Abe could do right then was to play dead. In no time, he felt himself buried alive. There he was, stuck in a tremendous pile of dead bodies, unable to move. Time was passing, and he felt himself getting weaker as the pain was getting stronger. He kept fighting to survive; he hadn't come all this way for nothing! But after a certain point, he couldn't handle the pressure anymore. He was done; it was all over. "Please!" he yelled with whatever energy he had left. "Just shoot me! Just kill me already!!"

Although he thought he was yelling, it barely came out as a whisper. However, there just so happened to be someone walking right past him, and he noticed something moving in the huge pile. Abe suddenly felt himself being pulled out, and lost consciousness after being placed on a stretcher. He woke up a short while later and found himself in a makeshift hospital. He started panicking, before quickly being calmed down by a doctor and nurse. "You've been liberated," they explained. "We're Americans. A soldier was walking past a pile of bodies and noticed you. You were on the brink of death. You need to stay here a few more weeks to recover." He went through the process of recuperating, and was discharged two months later. He was sent to the displacement camp, to try seeing if any family or friends survived. He went through the list; not one of his relatives had made it out alive. He made his way to America, the journey taking him a few weeks. Finally, after much searching, he found himself at the front door of his wife's aunt's house in LA. He knocked. The aunt opened the door and froze, staring in utter shock. "It's me, Abe." The aunt was stunned, and tried nodding. "Is Sarah here?" he asked. She came to her senses and started to stammer, "No, I'm so sorry... Sarah's not here." She saw the look of bewilderment on his face, and explained, "We thought you were dead. We inquired about you, only to learn that your entire camp was completely destroyed." "I'm here now," he replied with worry. "Where is Sarah?" The aunt hesitantly explained, "When she heard that you died, she took it very hard. She fell into a severe depression, and she's currently hospitalized in a very critical mental condition." Shocked, Abe exclaimed, "Then let's go to the hospital!" They made their way to the hospital, but first Abe made sure to buy flowers. Finally, as they were in the waiting room, Abe took out the picture – which, at that point, was almost completely faded out – and put it among the roses. "You really were meant for each other," the aunt admitted emotionally. "Sarah, too, had the same picture – of you, though – and would always look at it." So as not to cause an intense, sudden shock, they decided to have the aunt walk in the room with the flowers while Abe waited outside. She walked in, trying to catch Sarah's attention. No response. Sarah lay there, motionless. After a few moments, Sarah caught sight of the flowers from the corner of her eye, and noticed a picture clipped among them. She regained energy instantly and sat up, grabbed the bouquet, and picked up the picture, tossing the roses aside. "Who gave you this?" Sarah cried. Her aunt motioned to the door, at which point Abe walked in. Their eyes met each other's gaze for the first time in years, and tears started pouring down their cheeks. It was a very emotional reunion. Abe lived in the hospital room for a short while until his wife fully recuperated, and with his help, she was discharged soon afterwards. They got their own apartment in LA, and in their living room, they left one wall completely bare... except for one tiny picture in the center. One side had a beautiful picture of Abe, and the other a rubbed out picture of Sarah.

On the Seder night, we have a step called *yachat*, where we take the middle matzah, break it, and hide the larger half as the *afikoman*. Then, the children try finding it, only to hide it away until the end of the night, when they negotiate with their parents for a gift in return for their "stolen goods." This seems like an odd custom; are we encouraging thievery?

The split matzah is like the split-up picture in the story above. The bigger piece represents G-d. We hide it because Boreh Olam hides Himself in exile, and we leave it until the end because we need Hashem throughout everything in life. We are trying to impart a timeless message to our children: *If you want something in life, go find Hashem. Once you have Hashem in your life – for real – everything will be well.* That picture kept Abe going; our "picture" – the *afikoman*, representing Hashem – keeps us going. For indeed, without Him, what would be of us...