

SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

The Jewish Soldier Who Refused to Kneel to The Pope



This week marks the 33rd anniversary of the passing of my father Morris Kravitz (Moshe ben Avraham), of blessed memory. He was born in 1921 and passed away in 1988 on the 24th of Nisan 5748. My father cherished family and Judaism.

During World War II, Master Sergeant Morris (Moe) Kravitz fought bravely in the North African campaign in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Sicily, and Italy.

Before making his way to Rome for a much-needed leave, his fellow soldiers asked an unusual favor. Would their sergeant visit the Vatican and get rosary beads blessed by the Pope to send home to their mothers?

After taking a photo outside the Tomba del Milite Ignoto [the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier] Sergeant Kravitz made a detour to the Vatican. He purchased two dozen rosaries and waited in a special hall to ensure the Pope blessed the beads.

When Pope Pius the 12th entered the room, everyone knelt to greet him. Everyone except my father. When the Pope asked for an explanation, my

father politely explained that he was Jewish, and we kneel only to God. The Pope responded that he understood and respected him.

Like Mordechai, who would not bow to Haman (Esther 3:5), my father's refusal to kneel exemplified the essence of the Jewish faith. His example strengthens me in my battle to counteract groups that want Jews to worship false gods.

This week's Torah portion Shemini (Leviticus 9:1-11:47), speaks about God's command to distance ourselves from unclean animals. These laws are as meaningful and relevant today as they were thousands of years ago.

First and foremost, the kosher food laws are an opportunity to connect to God by following His will. However, on a deeper level, they teach us self-control and the importance of realizing that the world is not ours to do with as we please. God has charged us with the responsibility of guarding this precious earth.

My father did this by fighting a war to protect the world and defeat tyranny. I am proud to carry on his legacy by fighting for the survival of the Jewish people.

I will also honor my father by reciting the mourner's kaddish, sponsoring Torah learning, and giving charity in his memory.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

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