Shabbat by Halves

By Ami Pykovski

As a young man, I ran a clothing business in Los Angeles, in a prime garment district location - on the corner of South Los Angeles Street and Pico Boulevard. At the time I was early in my journey to Judaism and my store was open on Shabbat. On a typical Saturday I would make 5,000 -15,000 dollars, and this was a major portion of the weekly sales.

I wanted very much to close on Shabbat, but I calculated that if I did, I would lose somewhere between \$20,000 to 60,000 a month. After a lot of thought, I decided to close on Saturday. However, although the store would be closed on Saturday, I planned on working until late on Friday nights.

I wrote to the Lubavitcher Rebbe about my decision to close the business on Shabbat without saying anything about Friday night. The Rebbe's answer was, "Start from before sunset and great is your merit to joyously spread Judaism" (he underlined the word "joyously"). The Rebbe also enclosed 18 dollars and wrote that I should give them to charity locally - a bill of ten, a bill of five, a bill of two, and a bill of

Now it was clear: the business would be closed the entire Shabbat. But in order to do so, I had to break the lease with the landlord for the space I rented for my store. It was a huge area that was spread out over an entire block, so the cost of canceling the ten-year lease was enormous. I tried convincing friends to buy the lease from me, but nobody wanted to. When I saw that I had no option, I decided to inform the landlord that I was breaking the lease.

When I went to his office, I was told that he wasn't there. I went back to the store and a businessman whom I did not know walked in and said he wanted to buy the property. "I'm not the owner," I said. "You must talk to the landlord."

"I already spoke to the landlord," he responded, "and he is ready to sell, but he said that you hold the lease. This is why I am here - to buy you out."

Suddenly I had the upper hand. I started thinking hard how much money to ask from him for breaking the contract. Before I said a word. he offered an amount that was much higher than I would have dared to ask for. We signed an agreement and I evacuated the premises.

With the money I received for our arrangement, I bought a building and established a clothing factory, something I never would have dreamed I could do. In the normal course of things, I would have had to work for decades in order to achieve such a thing. Yet, the Rebbe had shortened the way for me. It was all in the merit of my deciding to keep Shabbat.

Here is another example where I saw unimaginable success after I decided to keep Shabbat. I had an offer to open a chain of stores called Indian Head in Los Angeles, but I decided not to get involved in retail so I wouldn't have to work on Shabbat. Instead, I decided to invest in the manufacturing of clothing and to offer it to Macy's.

When I went to the buyer, she thought I would show her dozens of styles, as was to be expected from companies that do business with Macy's. I came with just one style. She was very impressed that I had come with just one style. She said that because I had the guts to come to them, she was eager to work with me and she placed an order worth \$25,000.

That was the first time that I worked with a company on such a large scale and I was very excited. But when the clothing came from the dyeing process, I was devastated. They had mixed up the colors and every pair of pants came out in a different color.

When I saw this, I began to cry. I was sure I had lost all my money, which was a large amount in those days, as well as the opportunity to work with Macy's.

After vacillating for a while, I decided to send them the merchandise anyway. I left the office for two weeks, afraid of the angry phone calls I would get.

Sure enough, upon my return, I found dozens of messages from the company on my answering machine. The phone rang just then and the Macy's rep was on the line. "I've been looking for you for two weeks,' she said. 'Your pants were incredibly successful. They are totally sold out!"

* * *

In my youth, I was a promising professional soccer player in Israel. Over the years, I used my connections with friends in the world of soccer to spread Judaism. On one of my visits to Israel, I met with my former soccer trainer, David Shweitzer, with whom I was very close. He asked me jokingly who would advocate for him when he went to heaven after 120 years. I told him, "When you get up there, tell them you are Pykovski's friend and they'll take care of you."

The next day, I got a phone call from a friend who said that David had died. I was shocked. I thought, "how shall I keep my promise to him from the day before he died." I decided to write a Torah in his merit.

When the Torah was completed except for the last few rows of letters, we brought it to the Chabad yeshiva in Ramat Aviv. The finishing of it was spectacular. We wrote the last letters on the soccer field where David Shweitzer had served as a trainer.

The Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of Israel at the time, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, attended the event. He said that he had attended hundreds of such events in his life, but he had never experienced a moving one such as this, with the soccer players on the field in uniform together with Jews from all sorts of backgrounds writing letters in the Torah.

On one of my business trips to the Far East, I spent Shabbat at Chabad in Bangkok, Thailand, with one of the Rebbe's emissaries there, Rabbi Nechemia Wilhelm. At the Shabbat meal there were a few dozen young people. I announced that I would give tefillin as a gift to whoever

would commit to putting them on regularly.

A young Israeli sat next to me who wore the red robes of the local idol worshipers and who looked like a Thai monk. He raised his hand and said he commits to putting on tefillin. I was shocked, but I kept my word and sent him

Two years later I was visiting Israel and I spent a day studying in the Chabad yeshiva in Ramat Aviv. A young man approached me and asked me whether I recognized him. I said he must be mistaken since we had never met before, but he insisted that we knew one another. He brought me his tefillin and said that he was the fellow from Thailand to whom I had given tefillin and now he was studying in yeshiva.

Reprinted from an email of "Here's My Story", posted on Chabad, org





The Live-Saving Painter By Rabbi YY Jacobson

Elyasaf Mariah is a kind and humble man, a painter living in southern Israel. His story, which he shared with me, continues to inspire me each day.

For years, the relentless barrage of rockets from Gaza had left the residents of southern Israel with mere seconds - five, ten, twenty, at most thirty - to seek cover. In response to this ever-present threat, Israel constructed miguniyot - standalone, steel-reinforced bomb shelters—on nearly every street corner in the south, designed to withstand artillery fire.

Now, picture a young mother and her children huddled inside one of these shelters as rockets rained down around them. Though these structures offered physical protection, their stark, gray concrete exteriors only added to the sense of fear and isolation

Enter Elyasaf, the painter. With his palette and brushes in hand, he began transforming these shelters - both inside and out. A flock of birds in flight. The brilliance of a sunrise. A splash of vibrant color. A child's laughter immortalized in paint. A graceful animal. A majestic mountain. A breathtaking landscape.

With each stroke, he infused these lifelines with warmth and serenity, reminding the trembling Jews within, that beyond these walls, there was still beauty in the world. And he was meticulous - each shelter bore a unique painting, giving it a distinct identity and character. The community cherished him, grateful for his kindness and sensitivity. And that was that - until the horrors of October 7th.

Sirens blared. Thousands of rockets rained down upon Israel. Civilians fled to the nearest miguniyot, desperate for safety. At the Nova Music Festival, thousands of young Jews ran in all directions, searching for shelter. Moments later, the unthinkable became reality - terrorists had infiltrated Israel in a brutal massacre, a modern-day pogrom.

Huddled together inside these bomb shelters, panicked civilians began making frantic calls. "Please, come save us. We are inside a migunit, a bomb shelter."

"Where are you? Which shelter?" came the desperate replies. But how could anyone find them? With hundreds of identical shelters scattered across the



region, locating a single one was like searching for a needle in a haystack.

The trapped civilians didn't have an address. The only thing they could describe was the artwork - the images painted on the walls of their shelter.

The next morning, Elyasaf's phone erupted with calls and messages from frantic family members. The only clue we have is a painting, they told him. Our loved ones sent us pictures - a butterfly with two small boys chasing it, a girl in a green dress holding a white balloon.

Call after call described one of Elyasaf's murals. But he knew exactly where each shelter was, because he remembered every painting he had created. Shelter by shelter, he guided families and rescue teams to their precise locations, helping save countless lives.

We often fail to recognize the true impact of our work. Had you asked Elyasaf on October 6, 2023, "What do you do for a living?" He likely would have answered, "I'm just a simple painter. Nothing dramatic."

But he wouldn't have realized the significance of what he had been doing. He would think that he is merely adding color to concrete walls. In reality, though, he had unknowingly created a life-saving system - a network of markers that, on one of the darkest days in Jewish history, became beacons of help and hope.

Because wherever we are and whatever we do is guided by Divine Providence. And when we give our whole heart to our work - planting seeds of goodness, kindness, and love - we can never fully grasp the magnitude of what we are accomplishing.

Consider this.

Had the police contacted the Chief of Staff of the IDF, the Israeli Minister of Defense, the head of Mossad, the head of Shin Bet, or even the Prime Minister himself, not a single one of them would have been able to locate those shelters. There was only one person in all of Israel who could - Elyasaf Mariah.

The Talmud teaches: "Each person must say, 'For my sake, the world was created'" (Sanhedrin 37a). We often struggle to believe this. Really? For me, the entire world was created?

But Elyasaf's story proves it so. There was something only he could accomplish - something no one else in Israel, or even the world, could have done.

We often see ourselves as ordinary people, simply trying to make it through life. But this is a shallow perspective.

Judaism teaches that G-d tells each of us, "I need you. No matter where you are, what you do, your emotional state, or your circumstances - your presence in this world is purposeful. You are here to save lives, to lift hearts, and to bring light into the darkness."

Like Elyasaf, you have something to offer that no one else can. And G-d is waiting for you to paint your picture and to illuminate the world with your unique light

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ראש חדש ניסן יהיה מחר ביום ראשון Rosh Chodesh Nissan will be Tomorrow, Sunday

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Pekudei

This week's parsha of Pekudei is remarkable. Most of the portion provides for us a detailed balance sheet. After the construction of the Mishkan we're told exactly what the nation contributed and how Moshe used every single item in a responsible way. In this manner, Moshe wanted us for all time to know that what he had done was carried out faithfully and correctly.

Torah Compilations Parshat

Moshe was sensitive to what we call בראית עין. He knew how important it is not only to do what is right, and to be seen to be doing what is right. For example, we are conscious of if, let's say, a person goes into a non-kosher butchery in order to buy some bones for his or her dog. Someone who sees this happening might conclude 'ooh that's terrible; they're buying non-kosher meat for themselves. Or alternatively an onlooker could say 'ah I didn't know that that butchery is kosher.' It's right always to do what is right and to be seen to be doing what is right.

In this spirt the Talmud tells us that in Temple times the tax collectors were instructed never to have pockets in their clothes nor folds in their garments. They would hold the monies that they had taken in their hands and similarly we are told that when raising funds for charity we should go around not as single individuals but in pairs.

The Mishnah tells us about the Garmu family. They were responsible for baking the shewbread in the Temple, and they kept the recipe secret within their family circles from generation to generation, and they had a tradition; they never served baked goods in any of their homes, They didn't want the thought to cross anybody's mind that they were using Temple ingredients for the baked goods that they were serving. Similarly the Mishnah adds that the Avtinas family were responsible for preparing the incense in the Temple, and they had a family custom when it came to their family simchas – none of the women ever wore perfume, lest it crossed the mind of anyone that these women were using some of the sweet fragrances of the Temple for their own personal needs.

The Torah is well-known to be exceptionally concise. Often we learn major laws from just one word, sometimes even from one single letter. But this week's Parsha provides all the space necessary to provide the balance sheet, in order to let us know how sensitive Moshe Rabbeinu was to מראית עין. And so too should we be sensitive to it. Always to do that which is right, and to try to guarantee that we will be seen to be doing what is right.

Let's please join together to pray with all our hearts, for the healing of all those injured, for the safe return of those taken as hostages, as well as Divine Protection for our brave IDF soldiers, police officers, medical professionals, firefighters, ZAKA members, security personnel and all those citizens protecting us in Israel as well as around the world, and for those who need healing, shidduchim, children or parnassah and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual, safe, quiet and sweet Shabbat.

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 0 MITZVOT ASEH: 0 MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 0

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 92 NUMBER OF WORDS: 1182 NUMBER OF LETTERS: 4432

We take out two Sifrei Torah, in the first, we have seven Aliyot in the weekly Parsha, followed by Half-Kaddish.

In the second Sefer Torah, the Maftir reads from Parshat Bo (12:1-20)., which starts with the first Mitzva given to the Bnei Yisrael, while they were still in Mitzrayim, even before the Mitzvo to fthe Chag Pesach - the Mitzva of Kiddush HaChodesh. The reading begins with the declaration that the Hebrew month of Nissan, and not Tishrei, is to be considered the first month of the year. The passage then continues with some of the mitzvot of Pesach, which are certainly appropriate to be read and studied as the holiday approaches.

HAFTORA

Ashkenazim: Yechezkel 45:16 – 46:18 Sephardim & Chabad: Yechezkel 45:18 – 46:15