

ISSUE | ערב שבועות, ה' סיון, תשפ"ג
541 | Erev Shavuot, May 25, 2023

HERE'S my STORY

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A DREAM COME TRUE

MR. NISSIM MIZRAHI

I always felt that I would like to keep Shabbat and be religious. But unfortunately, when I lived in California during the '70s, I had to work on Shabbat. I wanted to stop working on Shabbat so badly that it was burning me inside, but in every job that I took, I had to do it.

After twelve years, I moved to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Myrtle Beach is popular with tourists, and in the tourist industry, Saturday is the most profitable day; if you refuse to work on Shabbat, you would be shown the door. By then, I had a family to support so once again I ended up applying for a job in a chain store selling beach gear, where I had to work on Shabbat. But one day, I decided that I couldn't take it anymore.

It was a Thursday afternoon, in the fall of 1991. During my lunch break, I decided to call the local Chabad House to ask Rabbi Doron Aizenman what to do, and he suggested that I write to the Rebbe.

What am I going to tell him? How would I write this? "Please," I asked, "sit down with me and show me what to do." Rabbi Doron told me to come over, explained the traditional way to address the Rebbe in writing, showed me how to use his fax machine, and left me in his office on my own.

"One thing you should know," he warned before leaving, "is that you're not going to get an answer for a while. It might even take three or four months." In those days, he explained, the Rebbe no longer had the time to respond to every question that came his way, and certainly not right away.

I wrote my letter, placed it in the machine, dialed the number, and waited for the beep that told me it had been sent. After going back to work, I closed the store, headed home, and went to sleep.



That night, the Rebbe came to me in a dream. It was so vivid that I felt he was standing next to me in the flesh. He then said a few words to me; I saw his beard move as he spoke, and heard his voice clearly: "It's forbidden to work on Shabbat." And then he disappeared. I jumped out of bed, not knowing what to think.

The next morning, I went back to open the store. I felt confused. I didn't know how to speak to the customers nor did I want to. Everybody in management happened to be on leave that week; I tried calling the main office for our chain of stores to discuss taking the weekend off, but nobody was there. I called Rabbi Doron to tell him what had happened, and he thought I had to do something. But what?

At around eleven or twelve o'clock, Rabbi Doron got a call from Rabbi Groner, the Rebbe's secretary. "Do you know a person by the name of Nissim Mizrahi?"

"Yes," Rabbi Doron confirmed.

continued on reverse

MY ENCOUNTER
with the REBBE

An oral history project dedicated to documenting the life of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory. The story is one of thousands recorded in over 1,700 videotaped interviews conducted to date. While we have done our utmost to authenticate these stories, they reflect the person's recollection and interpretation of the Rebbe's words.



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"There is an answer to the letter he wrote yesterday. The Rebbe wrote: 'Heaven forfend, Heaven forfend' — twice, and underlined — 'it is contrary to the Ten Commandments!'" That is, keeping Shabbat was one of the Commandments, so how could I consider going to work on that day? The Rebbe also added that he would include me in his prayers at the resting place of the Previous Rebbe. Rabbi Groner concluded that the Rebbe wanted me to get back to him before Shabbat, which was only a few hours away, and tell him what I was going to do.

Rabbi Doron called me bursting with excitement. "I don't believe it!" he exclaimed. "People have to wait months for an answer. And you only sent the fax last night!"

From the hundreds of letters that came to him every day, the Rebbe must have been able to pick out the ones that he felt needed an immediate response. I think of it as though the Rebbe was able to feel the heat of the emergency: He wanted me to keep that very Shabbat!

All this made me feel flustered. The Rebbe is waiting to hear from me? This was too much. The one thing I didn't understand was, if I was asking about stopping to work on Shabbat, which is in my hands, why had the Rebbe answered "Heaven forfend"? And why twice?

"I don't know," said the rabbi, "but we will find out."

In the meantime, I had to give an answer to the Rebbe, but I still didn't know what to do. I couldn't just abandon the store for Shabbat — I had to find someone to give the keys to and have them close up the register.

A short while later, Rabbi Doron called me back. "Please make up your mind. The Rebbe is waiting, and Shabbat is beginning soon."

I realized that the time had come for me to start observing this important *mitzvah*, which is one of the Ten Commandments. I just needed to be firm in my decision. Somehow, I got through to my boss's secretary and gave notice that I will no longer be working on Shabbat.

"Are you talking about this Saturday or every Saturday?"

"Every Saturday," I replied. "That's it."

I told the secretary to find my boss and have someone come over to get the keys. Eventually, they called back to say that someone would come to the store and that I could take a vacation. I thought they meant that I would be taking a permanent vacation, but I didn't care anymore, as long as I could stop working on Shabbat. "Please tell the Rebbe that I'm going to keep Shabbat from now on," I told Rabbi Doron.

Finally, I handed over the keys and the money, and I left, happy that I would be able to live the way I was supposed to. I felt free.

In honor of the Rebbe
and לזכות our children and our grandchildren
לאויש"ט.

By Rabbi **Eliezer** & **Chaya Laine**

You can help us record more testimonies by dedicating future editions of *Here's My Story*

Hurrying home, I got some challah and wine, and cooked something up for Shabbat. That night, I was able to sit with my wife, son, and daughter, and make *kiddush*. As it turned out, I was allowed to return to my job without working on Shabbat — everything worked out fine, and it has been ever since.

The next week, I was home, in the middle of preparing for Shabbat, when the phone rang. It was the police department, calling about my son, Joel. He had been in a bad car accident.

"Is he alright?" I asked.

"I've seen many accidents, and I've seen a lot of people get injured," the police officer told me. "So you should be feeling grateful. This was a bad crash, but both he and his friend came out unscathed." It turned out that the accident took place just one block from where I used to work.

A few more months later, it dawned on me. Maybe this is what the Rebbe had meant by saying "Heaven forfend, Heaven forfend" two times. The way I see it, my commitment to keep Shabbat led to Heaven protecting the lives of both my son and his friend.

Mr. Nissim Mizrahi has been living with his family in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, since 1983. He worked there as a retail store manager and warehouse manager — until he retired last year — and remains an active member in the local Chabad house. He was interviewed in February 2014.

This week in....

לע"נ ר' ישראל יעקב וזוגתו מרת קריינא ע"ה לאקשין
ע"י בניהם ר' נחמן ור' אברהם ומשפחתם שיחינו

> **5720-1960**, in honor of the 200th anniversary of the Baal Shem Tov's passing, the Rebbe requested that each *chasid* donate \$200 (or \$20 for *yeshivah* students) toward efforts to spread Judaism and *chasidut*.¹
7 Sivan

> **5744-1984**, during an address to guests from around the world, the Rebbe spoke about his newly-launched initiative for all Jews to unite in the study of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, through everyone studying the same laws at once, and encouraged the guests to attract new participants to the program.²
7 Sivan

1. *Torat Menachem* vol. 28, p. 121 2. *Torat Menachem* 5784 vol. 3, p. 1961

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