

The Saturday Surprise Sign *by Yaakov Cass*

My father, Abba haCohen (Albert) Cass, was born in 1921 in the town of Llanelli in South Wales. Jewish life and education in the UK during the 1920's and 30's was remotely distant from that of nowadays. Each community was small and isolated. There was no Chabad movement in the country to assist Jews in times of need and the Jewish London of those days was far removed from the Golders Green and Stamford Hill that we know today.

At the outbreak of the 2nd World War in 1939, the authorities posted my father to work in a factory in London making instrumentation panels for airplanes. He had trained as a jeweler and this work was not greatly different from repairing and making clocks and watches. It was certainly a better offer than being drafted into the armed forces. Life in the armed forces was not easy for any one. Paradoxically, despite the fact that England was fighting the accursed Nazis; anti-Semitism was rife in the British army and little was done to help Jewish soldiers keep the faith.

His mother imbibed in him a genuine affection for *yiddishkeit* from a young age. It was quite natural that when leaving Llanelli he took with him his *tzitit*, *tefillin*, a *siddur*, and a *Chumash*. He hoped that despite the ongoing hostilities and the blitz on London he would still be able to keep as many *mitzvot* as possible. However, London was far removed from Llanelli both geographically and spiritually. His living quarters and work site were distant from the Jewish areas of London. He had no contact with Jewish people and was informed by his superiors, in no uncertain terms, that England was at war. The factory was open seven days a week and failure to work on Shabbat was an offence. The loss of his job would mean being drafted to the front lines. For the first time in his life, he was unable to keep Shabbat.

When the war was finally over, a cousin, serving as a Rabbi of a small community, near London, introduced him to my mother. Mother had been brought up with much Jewish awareness but without any formal Jewish Education. After the wedding, they settled in Llanelli for a short period. Mother learned much about Judaism while living there, but lacking a livelihood, the young couple moved to my mother's hometown. My grandfather gave father a section of the family store where my father opened a jewelry division. My father wanted to close his department on Shabbat but was told quite clearly that this was "impossible". Business takes place on Saturday. "Better to close 6 days a week, so long as you work on "Saturday" was a phrase that he and many other young Jews heard in those days.

He loathed having to work on Shabbat but always hoped that one day the situation would change. As a “second best”, he organized his work breaks to fit in with *Shul* attendance on Friday night and/or Shabbat morning whenever he could.

After some years, my parents moved to a different town, with no Jewish population, to open their own business. Over the years that followed, he often tried in thought or deed to close his business on Shabbat, but the old mantra overpowered his good resolutions.



During our childhood, we siblings were encouraged to practice *yiddishkeit* as much as possible. As my brother and I were older, it became the custom in our family that we would run the business for 3 weeks every summer holiday. This gave my parents a well-deserved annual vacation. We brothers were, by now, fully Shabbat-observant, thus for three Shabbatot every year the business was closed.

Time moved on, my brother married while I decided to go to *yeshiva*, before settling down in my chosen profession.* I went to learn in Kfar Chabad under the tutelage of HaRav S.Z. Gafni. At the end of that year I made my very first visit to the Lubavitcher Rebbe at his court in the famous ‘770.’ On the way there, I made a stop in England for three weeks to allow my parents to take their time-honored holiday.

My first action in the store was to prepare a notice announcing that the shop would be closed on Shabbat. This put me in a dilemma. As much as I wanted, I had no authority to assert that the store would now be closed every Shabbat. Similarly, I had no desire to write that it would be closed only on this Shabbat. I searched for a suitable compromise. Utilizing the vagaries of the English language, I printed, “**This shop will be closed all day Saturday.**”

After, two weeks my parents came home unexpectedly, they had decided to cut their holiday short, thinking that it was inappropriate for a *yeshiva* boy to be working in a business instead of learning in *Yeshiva*. As the weekend approached, my father decided to keep the status quo. There would be no change in the family tradition of many years and the third Shabbat was honored as usual. The notice remained in place and my parents went to London to spend a happy family Shabbat.

OPEN AND REVEALED MIRACLES

In the UK, in those years, businesses were closed on Sunday and reopened on Monday morning. Accordingly, on the following Monday morning the doors of my parents' shop were duly opened at 9:00 a.m. Lo and behold, after no more than 10 minutes a large tourist coach pulled up outside the store. Over 50 visiting tourists entered and started to buy everything that the eye could see. Money was flowing like the water in Niagara Falls. Somewhat taken aback, my father asked one of the people, "Where are you from? Who are you? What is going on?"

They explained that they lived about 400 kilometers away from the shop and they were a group of friends who occasionally travelled to see different parts of the U.K.; always on a Saturday. They came to the town two days previously, fell in love with the shop from the outside but were bitterly disappointed that they could not enter. They had therefore they hired another bus and returned on that remarkable Monday morning; spending money like it was going out of style.

At the end of the week, on Friday morning my parents realized that, remarkably, their weekly takings thus far, was more, much more, than in an average week. My father concluded that the Creator was very happy that the shop had been closed on the previous Shabbat. Leaving the notice firmly attached to the door they decided to leave the shop closed for the upcoming Shabbat. So, Friday afternoon saw my parents drive home to London and keep another Shabbat. The miracle repeated itself week after week less working hours with a larger turnover!

During the month of Elul, the final month of the Jewish year, I was in 770 basking in its unique atmosphere of holiness. Nevertheless, I received regular reports about my notice. My father said that it was as if G-d had picked up the pavement and people were sliding into the shop and spending their money at the behest of a higher force.

The next test came quickly for Rosh Hashanah was approaching. Yom Tov was Thursday and Friday. My parents left the shop on Wednesday afternoon and did not return until five days later. This meant that the shop was only open for half of that week yet their income did not waver at all. Yom Kippur, the first two days of Succot, Shmini Azeret and Simchat Torah came and went. The notice stayed bonded in place and the Al-mighty took care of their income.

THE YETZER HARA'S LAST ATTEMPT

Those brought up in Western countries, may remember there is a time of the year when the local population goes completely wild, buying presents for their end of the year annual holiday. The day before the holiday is the busiest shopping day in the whole of the UK. The day before not much less. Businesses relied on the time to carry them through, financially, for a large part of the year. Looking at the calendar, my father noticed that this amazingly profitable day fell out that year on no less a day

than Shabbat. The day before, Friday, Shabbat started at 3pm. London was 2 hours' drive away. Both days were "lost".

The *Yetzer Hara* ('evil inclination') persuaded him that G-d no longer loved him; otherwise, this could not have happened. "You just cannot afford to close your shop for two such busy and profitable days." Inexplicably my father pulled the notice off the door.

This was a Monday morning. That Monday not a single customer came into the shop. The next day Tuesday the notice was still down and again no customers came in. On the Wednesday, my mother who did not speak very much and always kept her thoughts to herself, looked at my father in the eyes and said, "Put back the notice or else you will destroy your *neshama* (divine soul)."

The word '*neshama*' was not part of her known vocabulary. Somewhat taken aback by this bold statement, my father without as much as a word replaced the notice on the door. Within a matter of minutes, customers poured into the shop from every conceivable direction. The miracle had restarted. It goes without saying that the shop was never open again on a Shabbat and the notice stayed in place until the day the business was sold.

FRIDAY STREET

After Chanukah, I became engaged. I brought my *kallah* (bride [to-be]) to see the shop and our apartment above it. The shop was mostly on a main street, but continued around the corner along the side street. My family had only ever used the name of the main street for the store's address. However, the main window of the apartment faced the side street.

The first time my *kallah* looked out the window, she was immediately confronted by the bold street sign facing the window: FRIDAY STREET. She turned to my father and asked him if he had ever noticed the name of the street. He smiled and said, "Yes of course. It's there to remind me to go home for Shabbat!"

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\* *Source:* Submitted by Yaakov Cass. Cass, a Lubavitcher chasid, is a former District Pharmacist of the Israel Ministry of Health.

*Editor's note:* A shorter version of this article appeared in Living Jewish several weeks ago. The above is the full version, as requested of me by the author.