

Stranded on Shabbat

One Friday afternoon a van with eight teenage boys, students of the Chabad Migdal Emek yeshiva in northern Israel, was traveling on a winding road in the Galilee. They made a circuit every Friday, visiting different settlements in order to give the residents an opportunity to lay *tefillin*, have their *mezuzot* checked, and send out pamphlets explaining various *mitzvot*.

After hours of traveling and outreach work without a moment of rest, the time had come to return to the *yeshiva*. They were tired, hungry, and thirsty. "Let's have a short rest by the roadside," said one of them. "There seems to be a nice spot over there."

The boys exited the van and searched for a suitable place. Resting in the shade of a large, ancient olive tree, they drank soda and breathed in the clear air of the Galilee hills.

One of the boys went to lie down in the shade of a different tree a short distance away from his companions. In exhaustion he fell fast asleep.

After ten minutes, the boys returned to their van. Since all of them went to different places each Friday and the team frequently changed, nobody noticed that one of the students was missing.

After about an hour, the boy awoke and to his surprise discovered that the van had disappeared. He ran to the road, but there was no trace of the van.

Here he was, alone on a dusty road in the Galilee, and Shabbat was approaching! How would he make his way back to the *yeshiva* on time? Where would he stay for Shabbat? Where would he eat the Shabbat meals? Where would he pray and listen to the Torah reading? And how would he be able to shower and change his clothes in honor of Shabbat?

On the Road

He started to walk briskly along the road. Perhaps he could reach the main road and find a car that would take him to the *yeshiva*. But the road was silent and no cars were passing by on that late Friday afternoon.

The sun cast its red rays on his face as it set on the western horizon. The boys hastened his steps in order to reach a settlement before the entrance of the day of rest. However, the only settlements he could see were Arab villages where naturally he had no desire to spend Shabbat.

Since carrying on Shabbat was forbidden, he removed whatever he had in his pockets and placed them under a stone. He was careful to leave a certain sign in order to find them later.

Darkness had already descended upon the Galilee hills when the student reached a Jewish settlement. It turned out to be a kibbutz where the members were non-observant. Reluctantly he decided to ask permission to remain there for the duration of Shabbat.

Walking on one of the concrete paths, he encountered a member of the kibbutz and said, "Excuse me. I have nowhere to stay in this area for Shabbat. Is it possible to find a place for me to stay in your kibbutz?"

"The kibbutz secretary lives in the third house on the right. You should ask him," the member answered.

The student went to see the secretary, who understood his situation and showed him a room where he would sleep. The secretary also invited the young man to supper in the kibbutz dining hall. The student thanked him but felt that he could not eat there, as the kibbutz lacked a kosher kitchen.

Instead, he asked for two whole loaves of bread (not baked on the kibbutz?--YT) and some raw vegetables. Afterwards he prayed the Shabbat evening prayers alone, much of which he fortunately knew by heart, in his room. He made *Kiddush* on the bread and ate his Shabbat meal--bread and tomatoes.

Morning After

The next morning he awoke when the sun's rays penetrated his window. He remembered at once where he was. Now he had to get ready for the Shabbat day, praying without a *minyan*, without the synagogue Torah reading, without the Shabbat meals together with his friends in the *yeshiva*.

He prayed again by heart and read the Torah portion in a Bible from the kibbutz library. By noon he had his meal, consisting of the same menu as the night before.

With many hours left until the end of Shabbat, he took a pleasant walk through the kibbutz and saw the many children strolling around. An idea crossed his mind. "If I'm still here, maybe I should try to make a children's gathering and tell them something about Judaism!"

He approached the children and asked if they wanted to participate in a small Shabbat party. A big group readily agreed. A few youth counselors from the kibbutz also joined, in order to see what was going on.

The *yeshiva* boy started to sing Jewish songs together with the children. They all happily joined in with loud voices, clapping their hands. He told

them about the weekly Torah portion and a number of Chassidic stories. All the children gave him their full attention. This was the first time in their lives that anyone had introduced them to authentic Judaism. They enjoyed every moment of the party.

Certain Mission

Towards the end, the *yeshiva* boy said to the children:

“You should know that everything that happens in the world is by Divine Providence. The Creator of the world prepares the steps of each man. Wherever he goes, he has a certain Divine mission to fulfill, although we are not always able to understand the purpose of everything that happens.

“For instance, look at what happened to me and where I am this Shabbat. I was supposed to be together with my friends in my yeshiva right now, and instead I ended up here, together with you.

“I am one hundred percent sure that it was not by pure chance that we decided to stop that van exactly next to those olive trees on the side of the road. It was not by chance that I fell asleep under a tree at a distance from my friends. It was not because of ‘luck’ or ‘bad luck’ that my friends continued the trip back without noticing I was missing. Neither was it a coincidence that no cars passed by on the road and I continued by foot until I reached the first Jewish settlement on my way, which was your kibbutz.

“Why did I have to come here? Well, I do not know the answer to that, but I am sure that...”

His speech was suddenly interrupted. One of the girl counselors jumped up and exclaimed, “I know the reason for your being here!”

All of them present turned around and stared at her in amazement.

“I have always taken an interest in my religion,” the girl continued, “and I always wanted to learn more. I heard that Lubavitchers organize evenings with explanations about Judaism, and I asked several times the head of the cultural committee here to invite them, but he always turned down my request.

“Finally I decided to do something entirely different. I turned to G-d for help! During this whole week I have been praying to G-d to send a Chabadnik to our kibbutz. And here you are!

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*Source:* Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the report of **Rabbi Shimon Sonnenfeld** of Kiryat Malachi, Israel, as posted in an e-mailing from “The Avner Institute” <Rebbebook@Gmail.com>, Wed, 23 Nov 2011.

*Connection:* Weekly reading of *Vayeitzei*, from where we derive the distance restrictions for walking outside of residential areas.