

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles <editor@ascentofsafed.com>

Story #1213 (5781-25) 24 Adar 5781 (March 8, 2021) FREE [email subscription](#)
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Lost Shabbat in Yonkers

In January 2021, one of my beloved congregants in Lincoln Park Jewish Center [in Yonkers, NY – see ed. note at end] told me [**Rabbi Levi Welton**] it would be his last Shabbat in *shul*. "Sorry, Rabbi, but I got offered a job and I'll have to work on the Sabbath." He caught me off-guard as we both stood socially distant from one another, our masks covering our faces.

He had been a rabbi's model congregant (and, by that, I mean he didn't fall asleep in my sermons) and I was just beginning to get to know him. What was I supposed to tell him? That I'd love to see him whenever he can make it to shul? That there are many other *mitzvahs* he can do to bring Mashiach? The Corona virus has impacted so many people financially and they were offering him a lucrative salary. Who was I to mess around with someone else's *parnossa* (livelihood)?

For those who know me, you know that I hate conflict and often bend over backwards to accommodate and not alienate. But this wasn't some trivial Facebook-debate. This was the holy Shabbat we're talking about! I was on the spot. What was I supposed to do?

"What would the [Lubavitcher] Rebbe say?"

This thought pierced my mind as I stood there, his eyes searching mine. I took a deep breath.

"My brother," I began. "It is impossible that the Creator of Heaven and Earth would give a child of His a challenge he cannot overcome. A great Jewish poet - the Ahad Ha'am - once said, 'More than the Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews.' You must tell them you can't work on the Shabbat. And, if you need a letter stating you require religious accommodation, I will write one for you."

During this past week, he did not reach out to me. I worried if he would ever talk to me again. "Maybe I shouldn't have pushed so hard?"

Today, after I finished praying the *Amidah*,¹ I turned around to face the congregation and saw him in the second row. He smiled and waved to me. I snuck over to him and asked in shock, "What are you doing here?!"

He leaned close and said, "Rabbi, everyone else in my life was encouraging me to take the job. You were the only one who was adamantly opposed. Yet, in the end I turned it down. I thought to myself, if there are Holocaust survivors like R' Chaim Grossman who still show up to *shul*,² then how much more so should I.

¹ Silent, standing prayer of 19 blessings on weekdays and 7 blessings on Shabbat and Biblical festivals (9 in one of the Rosh Hashana prayers).

² Another good story – see Rabbi Welton's website.

So guess what happened next? When my old job heard what happened, they offered me a raise to stay. Plus, they put in my new contract that I will never have to work on Shabbat! I want you to know that if you hadn't given it to me straight, I wouldn't be standing here today."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Tears hit my eyes. In my sixteen years as a Rabbi, this is one of the top moments of my entire career. I opened my mouth and told him that the Talmud (Avodah Zarah 17a) states there are those who acquire their World to Come in (just) one glorious moment.

As the service progressed, I couldn't control myself and I stood up in front of the entire congregation and, with his permission, told them what had occurred. I said that the Talmud (Berachot 6a) teaches that G-d wears *tefillin* just as His children do. In our *tefillin*, it is written, "Hear O'Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Deut. 6:4). But, in His *tefillin*, it states, "And who is like your people Israel, a nation unique on Earth." (II Samuel 7:23).

This man inspired our entire congregation. This man inspired me. It's easy for me to come to *shul* on Shabbat. After all, I'm paid to do so.

But, for someone like him, to make that choice....achh, all I can say is that we are now reading the stories in the Torah of the "miracles and signs" G-d made for the Jewish people in Egypt. But this was a great miracle this man made for G-d.

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*Source:* Lightly edited and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from a post by Rabbi Welton on ???

*Biographical note (from Aish.com):*

**Rabbi Levy Welton** is an educator-turned-writer passionate about sharing the values of Torah with a global audience. Raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, he holds degrees in medicine, education, and film. Currently, he works as the spiritual leader of Lincoln Park Jewish Center in Yonkers, NY, and a healer for low-income patients in NYC. Additionally, he serves as a chaplain in the United States Air Force. When he isn't working, you'll find Rabbi Welton promoting the Jewish homeland, cultivating cultural relationships for the *charadei* [very strictly Orthodox] community, and interviewing extraordinary people for his monthly newsletter. For more info, visit //rabbiwelton.com

*Connection:* Weekly Reading – the significance and sanctity of Shabbat observance (Ex. 31:12-17).

*Editor's note:*

My wife (maiden name: Lauterbach) grew up around the corner from Lincoln Park Jewish Center. Her father was a member and on the Board of Directors for decades. Several family celebrations were held there.