



בס"ד

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SHABBAT BY HALVES

As a young man, I [**Ami Pykovski**] 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 one.

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 me¹ 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!"

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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 Schweitzer, 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."

¹ When I heard him tell his story at a Shavuot retreat in 2020, it was not nearly that easy. But as the details are now fuzzy in my mind I decided to leave this report unchanged.

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.

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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 tefillin.

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.

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*Source:* Compiled by Yerachmiel Tilles from a 2012 issue of “*L’Chaim*,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization, and from an interview for “Here’s My Story”, posted on Chabad.org.

*Why this week?* In this week’s Torah reading (Ex. 33:1-3), and in last week’s (Ex. 31:12-17), some instructions for proper observance of Shabbat are described.

*Biographic note:*

**Ami Pykovski** is a successful businessman, and a former professional soccer player who played for 36 years in Los Angeles as well as for the Israeli soccer team. Today, he serves the religious needs of the soccer players and is a very familiar face for Israeli soccer fans, once lighting a menorah for 30,000 spectators at a Beitar match in Jerusalem.