

SLICE OF LIFE

Shabbos, Kugel and Lesson in High Finance



by Steve Hyatt

Shabbos at Chabad of Northern Nevada, located smack dab in the middle of "The Biggest Little City in the World," Reno, Nevada, is always a festive and joyous occasion. From the roasted chicken to the mouth-watering potato *kugel*, Rebbetzin Sarah Cunin treats our taste buds to many of the great Shabbos delicacies.

I remember one particular Shabbos a few months ago. Friday night we were feted with the Rebbetzin's delicious fare. The next day Rabbi Mendel Cunin led our growing congregation through a spirited morning Shabbos service after which our lively congregation gathered together to share and enjoy a wonderful *Kiddush* together.

Between sumptuous bites of chocolate bobka and overflowing spoonfuls of the steaming *chulent* (stew kept hot throughout the entire Shabbos), we discussed the true joys of Shabbos and the laws pertaining to the prohibition of work on this special day. Most of us were confused about the definition of work, and what could and could not be done on Shabbos.

We learned that work is defined as the tasks associated with the building of the Sanctuary in ancient times. After some intense discussion we all felt we had a better understanding of this basic and so important concept. Enjoying ourselves immensely, we kept firing questions at the Rabbi and with the agility of a skilled short stop he fielded them all with grace and patience.

Sometime that afternoon someone asked the Rabbi if it was permissible to own a business that

stays open on Shabbos, even if the Jewish owner did not work, but rather observed Shabbos. The Rabbi made it clear that a Jew should disassociate himself from such business ventures and furthermore, shouldn't derive any financial gain from money earned on Shabbos. I didn't really pay much attention to this part of the discussion because I don't own a business and I don't do anything to earn money on Shabbos.

We ended the afternoon with a wonderful discussion about the concept of random coincidence. In the end we all agreed that there is no such thing as coincidence in life and that G-d's hand can be seen in many different ways if one simply opens his eyes and his heart.

Later that day I walked into my home and heard someone leaving a message on my answering machine. It was my realtor calling from Oregon. She was informing me that after five months of trying to sell my home, five months in which we hadn't received one single offer, we finally had a legitimate offer on the house. She went on to say that the person was leaving the country for a vacation and it was imperative we close the deal immediately.

I stood in the doorway paralyzed with fear. We had moved from Oregon to Reno in January. Each day for months I had prayed that "today" would be the day someone would want to buy our home. As each month came and went, I grew less and less hopeful we would be able to sell at a fair price. The more time went by, the more concerned I became.

Now I was literally standing in the threshold of my new home and the realtor was saying we had to move immediately or we could lose the one and only deal on the table. A voice in my head started screaming at me: "Pick up the phone! Don't blow the deal, pick up the phone right now!"

As I stepped through the door the realtor hung up. I must have stood and looked at that phone for an hour. Part of me was aching to call her back, but the other part of me kept reminding me that it was Shabbos and I should wait until tomorrow. As I fought this monumental internal battle, Rabbi Cunin's words came back to me. "Ultimately, nothing positive is ever derived from money earned

on Shabbos. Somehow, it is eventually lost or goes to pay for a negative liability. No matter how you look at it, a financial transaction conducted on Shabbos NEVER pays off in the long run."

Finally, I took a deep breath and slowly walked into the other room. I told myself that despite the panic in my heart, it was more important to embrace one's values and faith, than to toss them aside when they appeared to be somewhat inconvenient.

I spent the rest of the day reading and relaxing. After Shabbos ended, I calmly picked up the telephone and called my realtor in Oregon. She informed me that after calling me she had discovered that we really couldn't conduct business that day as the buyer's realtor was out of town until Monday. She told me that she was sorry she had left such an urgent message but she had thought we only had a day to consummate the deal.

Feigning nonchalance I told her it was not a problem and asked what we needed to do to complete the deal. We discussed the offer, prepared a counter offer and agreed to talk the next day. Within the next thirty-six hours of my conversation with my realtor, the buyer and I agreed on a price and the deal was consummated.

As I slowly put the phone back in its cradle, I marveled at the series of events that had just transpired. Over the years, since finding Chabad, I have discovered that the quest to become more observant and more spiritual is a gradual journey that builds one step at a time. Sometimes the journey is easy and other times the lessons are difficult. But one thing is certain; the journey is always filled with wonder and excitement.

In the last six years I can recount numerous conversations about the joys and pleasures of Shabbos. But it wasn't until this particular Shabbos, in this particular Chabad House, that I found myself involved in this unique Shabbos discussion. A discussion that ultimately prevented me from compromising my values and doing something I'd regret later. And if that wasn't enough, it wasn't until I was faced with, and made the right decision, that I finally sold my home in Oregon.

Coincidence? I think not. ■

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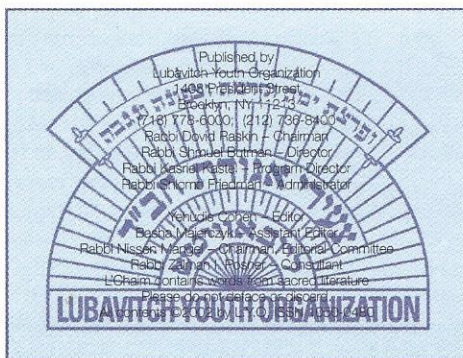
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The name of our publication has special meaning. It stands for the name of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson (obm), wife of the Rebbe, *shlita*.