

Good Shabbos Everyone. The Torah portion this week, parshas Emor, speaks about the holiness of Shabbos. As it states in the verse, "For six days labor may be done, and the seventh day is a day of complete rest, a holy convocation, you shall not do any work, it is a Shabbos for Hashem in all your dwelling places." (Vayikra 23:3)

The Chofetz Chayim in his introduction to the Laws of Shabbos, points out that the Torah warns us about keeping Shabbos a total of 12 times, much more than any other mitzvah. Why is the mitzvah of Shabbos repeated so many times? The Sages tell us that keeping Shabbos is compared to keeping all of the Torah. Because, by keeping Shabbos a Jew declares to the world that he believes that in six days Hashem created the heavens and the earth, and He (Hashem) rested on Shabbos. Just as Hashem stopped creating on the seventh day, so do we by resting on Shabbos. Thus we see how keeping Shabbos is the foundation of the Jewish belief, because keeping Shabbos demonstrates belief in Hashem.

The following amazing true story illustrates one Jew's amazing journey on the way to becoming Shomer Shabbos.

The mere mention of South Bend Indiana instills a sense of awe in all college football fans. Young children are imbued with a love for football from the cradle. South bend is simply the college football mecca of the world. So how, you might ask, did this town become the location of a yeshivah gedolah, a beautiful Torah community and a mikveh? It all began about 45 years ago in the town of Rock Island, Illinois. Young Nathan Lerman attended Rock Island High School and played on the varsity football team. He was one of the few Jewish boys in the school and the only one on its football team. One night the team from Rock Island High played a game against a high school from Chicago, a team almost completely comprised of Jewish boys. Normally, a team will spend weeks preparing its codes and symbols for the captains of the offense and defense to signal to their teammates so they can know what they are supposed to do and where a specific play is going.

However, this team from Chicago figured that instead of motioning and risking misinterpretation by their team members, why not just call out the plays in Yiddish? After all, everybody on their team spoke Yiddish fluently and nobody on the other team did... or at least so they thought. This way they could spell out the plays clearly.

Little did they know that Lerman played for Rock Island High. Every play that was designed by the offense was defended masterfully by the defense. Lerman was all over the field. Every pass thrown his way was either deflected or intercepted. All told, Lerman intercepted five passes that evening and disrupted the opponent's entire offensive game plan. He was simply masterful.

Sitting in the stands, unbeknownst to Lerman, was a scout for the Notre Dame football program. He had been in attendance scouting a player from the opposing team. Immediately following the game he approached Lerman to tell him how impressed he was with his abilities. He was particularly astounded by his keen insight and astute football knowledge. And so he offered him an incentive laden four-year scholarship to the University of Notre Dame.

Lerman was shocked and quite flattered. He could not believe that he would be treading on the field where so many football greats had walked. He had not planned on a football career but was not about to refuse a scholarship to such a prestigious university. And so he gratefully accepted the invitation.

For the team's first practice, Lerman suited up trotted out onto the field. Although he was a small fellow, perhaps five foot six and 165 pounds, his enthusiasm and zest for the game showed up some of the more gifted players on the team. The coach, disappointed in his varsity team, reprimanded them for their poor effort. As a result, the upstaged players targeted Lerman, and a few plays later he hurt his knee and had to be carried off the field.

Just like that, his promising career was over. He recovered from the injury but was never able to play for the team again. However, since he was already attending Notre Dame on a four-year scholarship, he spent the next four years of his life in South Bend.

Along the path of life, Nathan Lerman slowly began to grow in his Judaism, and by the time he passed away at the age of 61, he was fully shomer Shabbos. He was a person with tremendous drive and desire, and in addition to growing in his personal life, he sought to become a high level businessman. Before long, he had established one of the largest privately-owned steel factories in all of North America. A high school football game, an opposing team calling plays in Yiddish, a scholarship, a wounded knee all led to one individual settling in South Bend, building a business, becoming a shomer Shabbos. Today, at least partially to Mr. Lerman's credit, South Bend, Indiana boasts a day-school, a yeshivah, a mikveh and a shul. Mr. Lerman's sons continue to follow in their father's footsteps as leaders and supporters of the community's Torah institutions. (Touched By a Story, R' Yechiel Spiro, p. 129)

We see from this story the amazing divine providence which led to one more Jew keeping Shabbos and to the spreading of Yiddishkeit (Judaism) in a town in Indiana. Let us be inspired by this story to pick up the little clues which Hashem is sending us everyday, to return His loving embrace. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**