

Good Shabbos Everyone. continued from last week. ...That week, after Shabbos, I brought him all the weeklies that had devoted full-color spreads to the wedding.

Mr. Roth said that he wanted to see a Rebbe's wedding from up close. I told him that it was a big problem, because the closer areas were reserved for family members, as well as major contributors. Then he said, "I'm not a family member or a friend, but I can be a donor."

I explained that we weren't talking about a hundred- or thousand-dollar donation. Then he sighed and said, "I don't have the best of health, or the best of family, but I have lots of money, too much of it in fact. Let's get a spot. Find out how to do it."

It took me less than two days to find out how to get a spot for the final sheva brachos. And so, almost imperceptibly, Mr. Roth had a new, exciting interest added to his life. He wasn't religious. I never asked him how Shabbos was observed in his house. But I didn't have to guess.

I arranged him a place at a wedding of a different rebbe. This was also large and impressive. He spent many long hours there, as well as at the events preceding and following it. Something inside him seemed to have changed. He asked me if he could see how we observe Shabbos.

It wasn't a problem for me. Since there was no room in our house for a guest, I arranged for him to sleep at my parents' home. They had a spacious house, with room for both Mr. Roth and my little family, who would entertain the guest so my parents wouldn't have to. Mr. Roth experienced a genuine Shabbos for the first time in his life. Needless to say, he was moved to tears. That Shabbos, he became my father's friend. They found many mutual topics of conversations, and I gained even more: my father now had a new friend, and Mr. Roth had enjoyed many hours of stimulating conversation with someone who could really understand him. Those conversations became steady affairs.

I spent just a year and half working for Mr. Roth. By the time the first year was finished, he had become a member of the family. He often spent Shabbos with my parents, and there were many weeks that my wife, children, and I spent Shabbos in his home, bringing all the food and trimmings.

Mr. Roth learned how to daven and recite blessings, he covered his head some of the time, he learned about the mitzvah of tithing, and he managed to donate sizable sums and form relationships with prominent rebbes and rabbis.

During the last half year, he was busier than he'd been during the previous decade. He seemed to have come to life, and became a different person, no longer the bored, grumbling Mr. Roth, but a person filled with happiness and gratitude.

Mr. Roth died in his sleep. When I arrived for work one morning, his house was filled with his children, attorneys, and medical personnel, all walking about aimlessly. I escaped after I'd found out the time of the funeral. I cried and mourned for him wholeheartedly. I had no doubt that he would have become a true baal teshuvah. I knew that I'd miss him very much.

Mr. Roth's sons sat shivah in his home. His attorney told them their father had requested they do so. They agreed. It was a strange week; they didn't know anything about the laws of mourning and they didn't have much patience, but somehow they managed to get through the week in a Jewish fashion.

I arranged minyanim and a sefer Torah, and they managed to recite Kaddish with great difficulty. After the shivah, the will was opened. Mr. Roth had changed it three months previously and approved those changes with a notary, witnesses, and video tape.

He bequeathed huge sums to Jewish institutions, he gave his children various holdings that he owned throughout the United States, and he left me his enormous house in his upscale New York neighborhood, along with close to a million dollars.

Without a doubt, I'd received quite a large salary for a year and a half of work.

But I gained even more than that. Today I no longer need to work for my livelihood. The money has been invested in special programs that provide monthly allotments to cover my expenses. I dedicate most of my time to elderly people with no one left to liven up their day, to give them the feeling that they're still worth something.

I explain to their families and to people who care, how many mitzvos they can achieve by spending time with the elderly. I try convincing people to adopt an elderly person who lives alone or whose family is too busy to spend much time with him, and see how much they can accomplish with fairly little effort. I personally visit private homes and seniors' homes, listen to the people sitting and waiting for no one, and tell them what's happening in the world. I ask them how best to care for my large family, I ask them who should be president and why, and listen to their financial schemes. Basically, I give them the sense that they're still alive."

Hashem commands us this week saying: "*You shall count for yourselves... seven weeks, they shall be complete.*" (Vayikra 23:15) This is the mitzvah of *Sefiras HaOmer* - the counting of the Omer between Pesach and Shavuos, the period in which we currently find ourselves.

The Sages have taught us that the time of *Sefiras HaOmer* is a time of special spiritual importance. Specifically, the Sages tell us that this is a time to work on our character. This is hinted to in the gematria - numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word "*Omer*" which is 49, which is also the numerical value of "*midah*" - character.

Historically, a great calamity befell the Jewish people during this period. Namely, 24,000 students of Rebbi Akiva died during *Sefiras HaOmer* because they did not treat each other with respect. (See, Yevamos 72b) By treating others with respect, especially elders, we show that are Jews whose spiritual goals include the perfection of our character. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**