

Good Shabbos Everyone. Let us begin this week with a short piece from the Kabbalah. The holy Zohar teaches us, that "Anyone who keeps the Shabbos, it is as if he has fulfilled the entire Torah." (Zohar, Part 2, 92a) The only way truly to understand this piece of Kabbalah is for one to keep Shabbos. Because, keeping Shabbos empowers a Jew to reach the highest spiritual heights. A Jew can only reach his potential with Shabbos.

We read about Shabbos this week in the 10 Commandments. As the Holy Torah commands us in the fourth commandment: "Six days you shall work... but the seventh day is Shabbos to Hashem, your G-d, you shall not do any work..." (Shemos 20:9-10) The Sages have taught us that more than the Jewish people have kept the Shabbos, Shabbos has kept the Jewish people. The following true story about one woman's brush with Shabbos desecration, demonstrates the beauty of keeping Shabbos.

"As I settled into my seat on Flight 1272 bound for Chicago, I glanced at the passengers filing down the aisle. My Jew-radar immediately went off; in addition to the business travelers toting their laptops and briefcases and the pleasure travelers wearing shorts and Walkmans, I spied several suede kippas, a chassidische hat and ankle-length skirts.

Despite our shared heritage, I didn't bother acknowledging them. They were strangers. And I live in New York, where strangers seldom exchange greetings, even if they recite the same prayers. The plane rolled toward the runway and I waited for takeoff. No such luck. The pilot announced the flight was being delayed three hours due to stormy weather conditions in Chicago. After three long hours, the flight finally took off on its way from New York to Chicago.

I glanced at my watch nervously. Usually, I avoid flying Friday afternoons for fear I won't arrive in time, but on summer weekends when Shabbos doesn't begin until 8 p.m., I figured I'd be safe. I figured wrong.

But I calculated that I could just make it if I didn't claim my luggage and jumped into a taxi when we arrived in Chicago. I turned around to check on my co-religionists. Two kippas were examining their watches. The chasid was on the airphone.

A half-hour before arrival, the pilot announced O'Hare Airport was shut down and we were landing in Milwaukee until we could continue on. My stomach sunk. Candle-lighting was an hour away. I'd never make it on time.

Like most religious Jews who work in the secular world, I'd experienced my share of close calls. But I never knowingly violated the Sabbath. Now, I was stuck. By now, the kippas and religious women with long skirts were huddled in the back of the plane. They had been joined by others. Shabbos was bringing strangers together.

It was time to introduce myself. We're going to get off in Milwaukee, a young man told me. The chasid had called Milwaukee's Chabad rabbi, who offered to host any stranded passengers for Shabbos.

'Come with us,' he urged. I nodded with relief but returned to my seat crestfallen since I had planned this weekend with my family for months. My non-Jewish seatmate, noticing my despair, inquired what was wrong.

When I told him the story, his jaw dropped. "Let me get this straight," he said, "You're getting off the plane in a town where you've never been with people you don't know to stay overnight with complete strangers?"

For the first time that day, it occurred to me just how lucky I was. When the plane landed, the pilot announced we were disembarking for religious reasons. Passengers stared at us, dumbfounded. My seatmate bid me farewell as if he didn't think I'd survive.

But I quickly realized I was among friends. As I attempted to carry my bags off the plane, a woman insisted on helping me. When we crowded into cabs to take us to the rabbi's house, the chasid insisted on paying for us.

And when the cabs pulled up at the home of the Chabad rabbi and rebbetzin, they ran outside to greet us as if we were long lost relatives. The sun set on Milwaukee as they ushered us into their home, where a long table was set for Shabbos with a white tablecloth, china and gleaming kiddush cups. Ahhh, we made it just in time.

When I lit the Shabbos candles, a wave of peace washed over me. With all that had transpired, I was warmed by the notion that the world stops with the first flicker of Sabbath light. Over a traditional Shabbos feast, the rabbi enchanted us with tales of the Baal Shem Tov and informed us that our re-route to Milwaukee was due not to the world of weather but of Divine providence.

We lingered over our meal, enjoying our spiritual sanctuary in time after the stressful day. Zemiros (Shabbos songs) filled the room. We shared disappointments about our unexpected stopover.

Most of the group was traveling to Chicago for their friend's aufruf ("calling up" the groom to the Torah on the Shabbos before a wedding) and wedding and were missing the aufruf. The chasid and his wife were missing a bar mitzvah. We pondered the meaning of the departure from our journey and marveled at the coincidences.

I had attended camp with my roommate from the plane, a couple had conducted business with my father, a man had studied in yeshiva with my cousin, the chasid used to work in my hometown of Aurora, Ill., and I had once spent Purim in Crown Heights with my hosts relatives.

Exhausted as we were, everyone was hesitant to leave the table to go to sleep. The next morning, a lively tefillah was followed by a leisurely meal where we exchanged stories about our lives, careers and dreams.

We nicknamed ourselves the Milwaukee 15 and wondered if future generations would retell the story of the flight that didn't make it in time for candlelighting. Saturday night, we made a regretful journey to the everyday world. But before we began the final leg of our journey, I called my husband to tell him all that had transpired.

"With whom did you spend Shabbos with?" he asked worriedly. I pondered how to explain who these former strangers were who had given me object lessons in Shabbos hospitality and in the power of Shabbos in bringing Jews together.

And, then as swiftly as a 747 can leave the tarmac on a clear day, I realized the truth: miles away from my parents, husband and home, I had accomplished what I set out to do when I booked my ticket: I had spent Shabbos with family." (From "Home For Shabbos" By Deena Yellin, Chabad.org) Shabbos is a gift to the Jewish People. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**