

Good Yom Tov Everyone. This year, Yom Kippur falls out on Shabbos. Therefore, we have an extra special opportunity, because we have the benefit of the holiness of both Shabbos and of Yom Kippur. The highest time of Shabbos is during Shalosh Seudos (the third meal) which occurs near nightfall at the conclusion of Shabbos. It is at this time that the Neshama-Yeseirah - the Extra Soul which we receive on Shabbos, departs the body.

The highest time of Yom Kippur is Neilah - which literally means the "locking" [of the gates of heaven.] The Neilah prayer is also said near nightfall at the conclusion of Yom Kippur. This year therefore, we get the double dose of holiness right before the conclusion of Yom Kippur; namely, the holiness of Shalosh Seudos, combined with the holiness of Neilah. It is during this special time that every Jew can take advantage of the final opportunity to do Teshuva on Yom Kippur.

The following true story will inspire us to use Yom Kippur wisely: The subway lurched around each curve in the tracks, tossing the straphangers from side to side like driftwood on a rough sea. Matt held on tightly, happy as a kid on an amusement-park ride. He checked the map displayed next to the train's door. Just a few more stops and he would be in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, the next destination on his post-college trek around the world.

Matt was an adventurous spirit who liked to veer off the well-beaten tourist itinerary and see the "real" side of a place. He was headed toward Williamsburg to see the "old-fashioned Jews," the Chassidim that one of his friends had told him about. He had heard that the locals spoke to each other in Yiddish, the signs were written in Hebrew letters, and that the men all wore long black coats and big round black hats. It was America, but coming from suburban California, it was a foreign country to Matt.

His only problem was that he didn't quite know what he would do when he got to the stop. He doubted that there would be a sign saying: "This way to the old-fashioned Jewish neighborhood." He needed a little guidance. Looking around the subway car, he noticed a man who was dressed in the manner of the Williamsburg residents. Matt cleared his throat, hoping to get the Chassid's attention. The subtle gesture didn't arouse the man from the book he was reading, a book with gold Hebrew letters on its plain black cover.

"Excuse me, sir?" Matt tried again. "Sir?" The Chassid looked up. "Could you give me directions to Williamsburg? I want to see the Jewish neighborhood." "Yes, I can tell you where to go. What brings you to Williamsburg?" "I'm visiting New York and I want to see the places where people really live. You know ... not just the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty. I heard that Williamsburg is an interesting place." The Chassid appraised the young man quickly, in a brief glance. "So tell me, where are you from?" "My name is Matthew Drebin," Matt answered. "I'm from California. I just finished college, so I'm spending this year traveling around the world." "Drebin, you say?" the Chassid repeated. "So you're Jewish?" "No, not at all. I'm not Jewish," Matt answered, as if the suggestion were outlandish.

"But Drebin is a Jewish name," the man persisted. "Where are your parents from?" "They're originally from Russia, but trust me, we aren't Jewish." The Chassid kept the conversation going for a few more minutes, probing Matt about the towns in Russia from which his family originated. Familiar as he was with the Jewish communities in Russia, the Chassid became more convinced that Matt was indeed Jewish. Every town Matt mentioned had had a sizeable Jewish population in the years before World War II. It was impossible, to the Chassid's way of thinking, that this boy, who was drawn to visit Williamsburg for no apparent reason, who bore a Jewish surname and had parents from Jewish towns in Russia, was not a lost neshamah seeking its identity.

As the train approached its stop, the Chassid tried one more time to make contact with the boy's pintele Yid (Jewish Essence). "Listen, I think you should really look a little more deeply into your family's roots," he said, "because if you are Jewish, then you have to discover what Judaism is all about. You're entitled to it. Here, take this paper and if you ever make your way to Israel, look up these Jewish schools I'm writing down for you." The Chassid wrote "Ohr Somayach" and "Aish HaTorah" on a piece of paper he had dug out from his coat pocket. He handed it to Matt and then answered his original question — where to go when he got off the subway. "Good luck with your travels," the man said warmly.

They got off the subway and parted ways. Only a month later, Matt decided to visit Israel. The first stop on his itinerary was the famous Western Wall. Doing as the natives did, he approached the wall and offered a short prayer to G-d. Something compelled him at that moment to find the piece of paper the Chassid had given him. He reached down into his knapsack and found a little pouch of papers he had put aside for safekeeping, and in there, he found the scrap. As he stood there by the wall, scrap in hand, he drew the attention of Rabbi Meir Schuster, the famed kiruv pioneer who has changed thousands of lives by meeting the lost souls that are so often drawn magnetically to the Kosel. "Can you tell me how to find either of these places?" Matt asked Rabbi Schuster. Only a few minutes later, Matt found himself standing inside the entryway of Aish HaTorah. Matt looked around nervously. He wasn't Jewish, after all. If he told that to the rabbis here, they probably wouldn't want to teach him. But for some reason, Matt wanted to learn. There was just something about the Yeshiva and Israel in general that piqued his interest. He decided to pretend he was Jewish for the time being. From that point, Matt's physical journey took a decidedly spiritual turn. He didn't explore much of the Land of Israel, but he did discover the hidden recesses of his soul. Everything he learned in those first weeks seemed precisely directed at the empty spaces inside him. He wanted more and more. So absorbed did he become in his studies at Aish HaTorah that he hadn't even called home. After three weeks, he finally called his father. "Hi, Dad, it's me, Matt!" "How ya' doing Matt? Are you enjoying your tour of Israel?"

"Well, the truth is that I really haven't done much touring so far," Matt replied. He hadn't exactly decided how he would tell his parents about this new phase of his life. "You haven't? So what have you been doing for the past three weeks?" A simple question, Matt thought. And there was a simple answer. "I've been studying, actually." "Studying? You couldn't wait to get out of school, Matt. What are you doing studying?" "Well... I found this Jewish school here, and I've been learning about Judaism. And you know what? It's really incredible stuff!" There was a thump on the other end of the phone, followed by dead silence. "Dad? Dad? Are you there?" Matt called in alarm. "Dad, are you okay?" (stay tuned for the exciting conclusion of this story!)

Good Yom Tov Everyone.

A Refuah Shleimah to Shusha Malka bas Golda "Anyone who brings merit to the masses, no wrongdoing will come into his hands."

Avos 5:21 To sponsor a drasha: M. Wolfberg 19 Koritz Way, Suite 212, Spring Valley, New York 10977 (845) 362-3234 **THIS PAPER**

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