

Good Shabbos Everyone. When Reb Yisroel of Rizhin was a little boy, he once dug himself a small garden on Friday afternoon and began to play. Seeing him busy at work, the young boy's older brother Reb Avrohom reminded the child: "Shabbos will be starting soon." The child looked up at the sky and said to his older brother: "You are right."

"And how do you know that [Shabbos will be starting soon?]" Asked his brother. "Well," said the young boy, "can't you see how the heavens are changing!?" (A Treasury of Chassidic Tales - Festivals p.421 Reb S.Y. Zevin, U.Kaploun, trans.) The Holy Reb Yisroel of Rizhin was so in-tuned to Shabbos that even as a young boy he could feel the holiness approaching. If we cherish (מחשיב) Shabbos, we too can feel Shabbos as it approaches.

By Friday afternoon, the Jewish home is busy getting ready for Shabbos – reading תרגום ואחד שנים מקרא, saying שיר השירים, cleaning the home, polishing the שטייול making the beds, tasting the special Shabbos foods. The preparations for Shabbos put a certain special feeling into the Jewish נשמה.

We read about the קדושה of Shabbos in our parsha this week *Ki-Sisa*, as the Torah tells us: "The *Bnai Yisroel shall observe the Shabbos, to make an eternal covenant for their generations.*" (Shemos 31:16) Every week on Shabbos we affirm our eternal covenant with Hashem. As the sun descends and the shadows grow long, the holiness of this special covenant approaches. Just as one looks forward to a celebration as it nears, so too does the Jewish soul look forward to Shabbos at it nears. The following amazing true story shows one Jew's experience with sundown on Friday.

Panama City was a long way from his native West Hartford, Connecticut, but to Matt Schweitzer the move was a great opportunity to enhance his career as an Air Force pilot. Matt would be flying an airplane which was only in service in that part of the world. As an officer, Matt was entitled to live off base, so he took up residence in a high-rise apartment building about half an hour away.

Having grown up as an active member of the Reform Jewish Movement, Matt was intrigued when he happened to meet a young traditional couple. After a few exchanges, they invited him to experience a Shabbos meal at their home. The experience was a revelation to him, and he soon found himself enjoying more Shabbos meals with these new friends, as well as with other families to whom he was introduced. Matt began to look forward to his Fridays; Friday meant that Shabbos had almost arrived.

Matt's interest in Judaism blossomed. He soon realized that the long neglected Bible that he had been given upon his graduation from the Air Force Academy was an integral part of this new way of life. Each night he would read a few pages, and he always came away amazed and inspired by the wisdom contained within the ancient text. No human, he was certain, could have authored this work.

He began attending classes given by Rabbi Daniel Grama. Little by little he became more and more committed to the Torah way of life. Shabbos observance presented a major obstacle, since many of his flights were scheduled on Saturdays. But Matt was undeterred. He was determined not to desecrate Shabbos for the duration of his Air Force career. For a few months, things worked out well, and Matt was able to avoid flying on Shabbos. But then the time arrived for the base's first ORI. ORI, the Operational Readiness Inspection, was a very important inspection dreaded by nearly everyone on base, regardless of their rank. A special team of inspectors would come from Air Force Headquarters to scrutinize every aspect of the base's operations. Promotions as well as suspensions could result from this inspection. It was no surprise that tensions ran high.

Designated as an aircraft commander for one of the crews during the ORI, Matt had to fly a number of missions. Inspectors on board and on the ground would be monitoring the flights and the accuracy of their landings. The ORI was scheduled to run an entire week, from Monday through Sunday. To his dismay, Matt discovered that he was scheduled to fly a mission on Friday night. Rescheduling simply was not an option. All he could do was pray that somehow Hashem would help him.

To minimize the problems he had to deal with, Matt decided to spend Shabbos on base. Briefing time was at 1600 hours (4:00 p.m.). Matt arrived equipped with wine, bread, food, a siddur, and a sleeping bag. The crew proceeded with the required briefings, then went to the armory to pick up their weapons. With a few minutes before boarding time, Matt decided to call Rabbi Grama. He told him about the situation he was facing. "Please pray for me," Matt concluded. "I will, Matt," Rabbi Grama reassured him. "We will also say *Tehillim* for you. Remember, Matt, Hashem is with you." Reassured by Rabbi Grama, Matt proceeded to make his way towards the aircraft. The mission was about to start. It was 5:20. The sun was getting low. Shabbos was about to come in...

Matt was just 50 feet away from the aircraft when a car pulled up with a screech of tires, and a sergeant jumped out. "The ORI is over!" he announced. "Because of the base's excellent performance, the last two days of the inspection have been canceled." Matt listened, openmouthed, while his heart swelled with joy. Shabbos was saved! It was hard to keep his feet on the ground, hard to keep from expressing his gratitude to Hashem. A look at his watch quickly brought him back to earth. Candle lighting was at 6:05, and he still had to return his gun to the armory and drive home in rush hour traffic. On Friday afternoons, his half-hour ride often turned into an ordeal of an hour or more.

Matt arrived at the armory, quickly turned in his gun and sped for his car. It was 5:40. Time was running out. Even without traffic, the drive normally took half an hour. Would he make it in time? Matt prayed for Hashem's assistance as he steered onto the highway. Matt blinked and shook his head. Where was the traffic that usually clogged up the road at this hour of the afternoon? The highway was almost empty! He made it to his apartment in a record 20 minutes, and just managed to light the candles while still in his uniform. Matt hurriedly dressed and began his 30 minute walk to the *shul*. He arrived there at 7:00, right on time for *Maariv*. He would never forget the expression on Rabbi Grama's face when he saw him - a look of mingled astonishment and happiness. The prayers had already started, so Rabbi Grama simply shook his hand and whispered with a smile, "Pray like you've never prayed before!" Matt, now Mordechai, was so touched by this amazing incident, that he grew even closer to Hashem and Shabbos observance. (*Visions of Greatness*, Rabbi Yosef Weiss, Volume 5.p.185)

As the sun takes its final turn towards the western horizon, we should begin to feel a change in our souls. We should begin to feel the holiness of Shabbos approaching. We should remember the amazing story of the air force pilot in Panama and his experience at sundown. As the shadows grow long on Friday afternoon, we should anticipate the happiness and peace of the special Shabbos. Then, several minutes before sundown, we will light the Shabbos candles and turn to our family members with glowing faces and say: **Good Shabbos Everyone.**

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

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