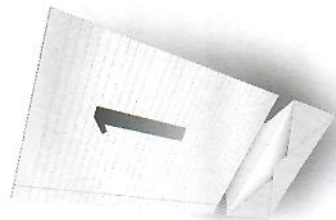


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Not for Sale

Dear Mr. Walder,

I imagine you remember me — the Jew from Meah Shearim who supplies you with stories now and then. Once again, I have a story to contribute. I wasn't going to tell you this one, but my children insist that it's a story with a message, an important message about Shabbos. So it has been decided (by my wife) that the story is to be written and sent to your post office box.



The story begins about forty years ago, when I was still marrying off my children, and the last penny that I didn't have to my name was becoming harder than ever to come by. In fact, things were getting tough.

I went to the financial manager of my kollel and asked him to help me find some source of extra income, so at least I'd be able to feed my children.

"I've actually been looking for someone," he told me. "I'm

one of the heads of Mishmeres HaShabbos — the organization that makes sure all the stores in Meah Shearim close at least one hour before Shabbos. The job is simple: You go around in a taxi, and if you see a store that's still open, you go in and tell the storekeeper he needs to close."

To be honest, I didn't think this form of *parnasah* was a good fit for me, as I'm not the confrontational type. But you don't always get to choose, and in any case it sounded better than skinning a carcass in the marketplace rather than accept charity, as our Sages recommend.

On Friday, I showed up at the manager's office. He told me that there was a regular driver who would take me around — a non-Jew to be on the safe side, so there'd be no *chillul Shabbos* in case he didn't make it home before sunset.

Before I left, he opened a drawer and took out a cassette tape. He said I should have the driver play it. I wondered what kind of tape could be of any interest to the taxi driver. What was it, something in Arabic? But of course I didn't let on what I was thinking; I was afraid the manager might regret giving me a job.

So I went out, got into the cab next to the driver, and told him to go to Kikar Shabbos, at the beginning of Malchei Yisrael Street. He started driving, and on the way I handed him the cassette. "I was told that you should play this," I said.

He didn't look surprised. He took it, slid it into the car's tape deck, and pressed the "play" button.

I was expecting to hear some Arabic song, but instead I heard nothing — not in Arabic, Yiddish, or any other language. It didn't seem to bother the driver, so I figured it just takes a few seconds for the tape to get started. But just when the song should have come on, I heard a loudspeaker outside, blaring at a volume that would drown out any song — even

an Arabic song, "It's forbidden to take part in the unholy elections..." and so on and so forth about why it's a sin to vote and what will happen to those who do so.

Now, I was very surprised and troubled by this. I hadn't heard about any elections taking place at the time — and since when do they hold elections on Friday, an hour before Shabbos?

I thought that we would soon be out of the loudspeaker's range, but it seemed like the loudspeaker was following us. Or else somebody had hung a loudspeaker in every tree in Geulah, just to make sure the whole neighborhood should know not to go and vote in the unholy elections on Friday before candle lighting.

Suddenly I spotted an open store. I asked the driver to stop, because I had to go in. I got out of the cab, went into the store, introduced myself as a representative of Mishmeres HaShabbos, and inquired delicately whether he was thinking of closing up his shop, considering the time.

"What?" he said, which was no surprise, since the loudspeaker was still blaring.

"Are you planning to close soon?" I shouted.

"Sure!" he yelled back. "Why are you screaming at me?" "I'm not screaming at you," I explained loudly. "It's just that those loudspeakers are making so much noise!"

"What? I can't hear you!" he yelled.

And again I explained, "I'm not screaming at you. It's just those loudspeakers! It's enough to drive you crazy!"

"What do the elections have to do with it?" he shouted.

"That's what I want to know!" I screamed. "I wish they'd shut them off!"

"Okay, okay!" he cried out hoarsely. "I'll shut down in just a minute!"

I went back to the taxicab, happy that someone was going to shut off that awful loudspeaker at last. But the storekeeper didn't keep his word. Minutes passed, and the loudspeaker was still blaring loudly enough to wake the dead.

We drove up and down Malchei Yisrael Street, and when I was finished there we went down Meah Shearim Street. Whoever still had their store open, I suggested that they close, and we made our way back to Batei Ungarin.

A group of little boys and teenagers came crowding around, staring at me in the cab. The loudspeaker was still blaring away, and I couldn't take it anymore. "Somebody tell me," I appealed to the youngsters as I got out of the car, "how do you get them to turn that thing off?!"

"Turn it off yourself," they said to me. I thought that was some *chutzpah*, answering me like that.

I said goodbye to the taxi driver, and then I remembered the cassette tape. "Can I have that cassette back, please?" I asked him.

"Sure," he said. He pressed the eject button and took it out.

The moment he pushed that button, all was quiet. Perfect silence.

Then, for the first time, I noticed the two large speakers on the roof of the cab, and all at once, it hit me. The cassette we were playing was what was making all the noise...

At that moment, the manager of the kollel came running out. "Why are you going around with an announcement about the elections?!" he wanted to know. "What has that got to do with Shabbos?"

I stared at him. "That's what I wish you'd tell me," I said. "First of all, you're the one who gave me the cassette to play. Second, I had no idea that the voice on the loudspeaker was

from the cassette. You should have told me that there was a connection between the cassette you gave me and the awful noise that was screaming in my ears the whole time."

He started to laugh. "I forgot to tell you..." he said in between guffaws. "Part of your job is to let the neighborhood know what time *hadlakas neiros* is... only I gave you the wrong tape to play. You were supposed to play the one that says, '*Hadlakas neiros* is at 5:27! *Ah gut Shabbos!*'"

He held his belly and laughed, and all of Batei Ungarin laughed with him. In fact, they had a jolly Shabbos that week, laughing at the poor fellow who went all around the neighborhood blaring an announcement about the evil of participating in the impure elections and didn't even know where the noise was coming from.

But I didn't let it bother me. To tell you the truth, I myself thought it was pretty funny. The only thing that bothered me was that due to the mistake, which was partly my fault because I didn't catch on sooner to what was happening, there was no announcement of *licht bentchen* time that Friday. I was worried that someone might have done *melachah* close to sunset because of me.

I want to point out that because of what happened I made a resolution to strengthen my Shabbos observance and review all the Shabbos laws in the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*. I mention this because that played a significant role in what happened next.



After that Friday afternoon fiasco, the kollel manager and I both agreed that the job wasn't a good fit for me.

He offered me another job instead: going around collecting donations for the kollel — in other words, being a *schnorrer*.

Of course, this job wasn't a very good fit for me, either, due to the fact that I'm not good at getting people to part with their money. However, due to the fact that I was lacking money of my own, I felt that I didn't have a choice and I took the job.

I was given a list of addresses to visit, with the aim of introducing these householders to our kollel and its activities. My plan was to gently hint to them that they might consider reaching into their pockets and coming up with a donation.

First on my itinerary was the home of a donor who had recently passed away. My task was to offer his family the opportunity of perpetuating his memory in the yeshivah. For a mere thousand dollars, they would get a nice plaque — or something even nicer if they would like to upgrade their donation accordingly.

The widow, I discovered, was a very elderly lady who told me that her eldest son handled the family finances and that she expected his arrival momentarily. She added that she was sure her son would be happy to give a donation in his father's memory. Her son, she said, had been managing the family business for years and was quite successful at his work. Then she began to cry.

I asked what was wrong, and she said, "I'm crying because my son has gone off the *derech* and stopped keeping Shabbos. Please *daven* for him, that he should go back to being a good Jew."

Before she finished the sentence, the man himself walked in. He was a distinguished-looking fellow, about forty-five, and he asked me politely how he could help me.

I answered that I needed to think about that a bit, and he looked at me strangely because he didn't know what I needed to think about.

I will tell you, Mr. Walder, what I needed to think about: That week I had learned in the *Sdei Chemed* that one should not accept donations from Jews who desecrate Shabbos, so that they shouldn't think they can atone for their *chillul Shabbos* by giving *tzedakah*. I wasn't expecting such a case to come to my doorstep so soon.

My problem now was what to say. I knew I couldn't accept his money; the question was whether to tell him that to his face or evade the issue.

I decided to take the middle path. "Pardon me, sir," I said, "but I'm not sure I can accept money from you."

He opened his eyes wide in surprise and asked me why not.

"I'd rather not say," I answered, "for fear of offending you, sir."

"You've already offended me," he said. "And I'd prefer to know why you think you can't accept my money."

"All right, I will tell you why, sir," I said. "I was conversing with your mother before you arrived, and she happened to mention that you don't keep Shabbos. That presents me with a problem regarding your donation."

I was scared as soon as I said those words, because he was a big, burly fellow, and he could have broken my bones with a few well-placed blows.

He looked more startled than angry, though. "I don't understand," he said. "No one has ever refused to take my money."

"Probably they don't know that you don't keep Shabbos," I suggested.

"Of course they know," he retorted. "Do you mean to tell me you'll give up a two-thousand-dollar donation because I don't keep Shabbos?"

I mustered up the courage to say, "Yes, that's what I'm saying."

He glared at me and I could see the anger in his eyes, and then he softened a bit. "Look," he said, "you come to my house and insult me... I'm not angry at you, because you seem like a sincere person. But I want you to know I'm very hurt."

"I'm very sorry, sir," I said. "I really didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I was only telling you what I learned in a *sefer*."

On that note, we parted, and I left the house.

I didn't proceed to the next address; I went straight to the kollel manager and told him what happened.

He was even angrier than the man I'd insulted. "You're going out of your way to hurt the kollel!" he said. "That family was giving me a hundred dollars a month, and on special occasions, several hundred dollars. I was expecting at least a thousand this time, and you had to go and insult him! And it's not just a loss of a thousand-dollar donation, it's a loss of all the money he would have given in the future!"

"Two thousand dollars," I corrected him. "I'm very sorry, but he was going to give two thousand, and I wouldn't take it."

When the manager heard that, he really lost his temper. "What have you done?! You're going to pay for all that money you've lost us! I'm taking you to a *din Torah*!" he fumed.

I left the office humiliated and depressed. I went home and told my wife the whole story. Not only was I out of a job, I told her, but they would probably stop my kollel stipend, too.

She go up from her chair, drawing herself up to a full five-foot-two. "I'd like to see them stop your kollel pay," she said. "I'm going over to talk to the manager this minute."

I already realized I'd made a mistake. Since when does a

man tell his wife such things? I should have kept it to myself and tried to smooth things over without her help.

It was just as I feared. My wife didn't help to smooth things over. No. She got them all rumbled, that's what she did. She went and yelled at the kollel manager, demanding to know how he dared to talk to me like that. The result was a summons to appear before the Badatz at Beis Zupnik for a hearing on the damages I was accused of causing to the kollel.

I appeared on the appointed day. The kollel manager came with a *to'en rabbani* (rabbinical court advocate) to represent him, and I came with my coat.

His representative began to unfold the dramatic tale of my terrible sin and the tremendous damage I had done to the kollel. When he was finished, it was my turn to speak. I explained that recently I'd made a resolution to review the laws of Shabbos and be more careful about the finer points of *shemiras Shabbos*, due to an unfortunate mistake that had come about through me.

I was going to say more, but the kollel manager decided to tell them about my unfortunate mistake. He described my Friday-afternoon taxi ride, complete with the announcement by loudspeaker of the prohibition of participating in the impure elections. This made the *dayanim* smile, and I could see that one of them was trying to hold back from laughing out loud.

When it was time to tell my side of the story, I described to the *beis din* my encounter with the mother of the donor and her lament that her son was a *mechallel Shabbos*. I went on to say that only recently I had come upon a Rema in *Orach Chaim* that said that if an apostate donates candle wax to a

shul, one may not use it. Furthermore, the Taz and the Magen Avraham add that this applies not only to an apostate who has become an idolater, but also to one who has become a Shabbos desecrator...

The *to'en rabbani* countered my argument with a *Sefer Chassidim* that disagrees with the Rema and says that one is allowed to accept a donation from a Shabbos desecrator, but his argument centered chiefly around the fact that I am not a *posek*, and in order to avoid doing damage I should at least have left the decision up to the kollel manager instead of acting on my own.

The members of the *beis din* told us to step outside, so that they could deliberate. From the waiting area we could hear most of their arguments. After a heated discussion, we were summoned back inside.

Their ruling was that although according to a majority of halachic opinions it is forbidden to accept donations from *mechallelei Shabbos*, there are many opinions which allow it, and therefore there was justice to the claim against me that I should have refrained from making such a damaging decision on my own.

However, they used the kollel manager's story of my *erev Shabbos* loudspeaker escapade as an argument against him: "You knew in advance whom you were dealing with," they said to him, "and this being so, you must also bear part of the damages."

The *beis din* ruled that I should go to the donor and try to appease him and repair the damage I had done. Should I be unsuccessful, I must give the kollel a minimum of \$1000, half of the loss I had caused according to my testimony. They emptied me from responsibility for future donations.



Slowly I made my way home, feeling completely depressed. I told my wife that we had to pay a thousand dollars to the kollel manager and that we'd gotten off easy compared to what he'd tried to get out of me.

"Where does that donor live?" my wife wanted to know.

"What does it matter to you?" I asked her.

"We're going to see him now," she said.

"I don't think that's a good idea," I said. "I'm afraid of doing even more damage." (Of course, I was really thinking that she was liable to do more damage, but I carefully refrained from revealing the slightest hint of my thoughts, for fear of the damage that might be done to me.)

The upshot was that we called a taxi and went to the donor's house.

He recognized me right away. "You're the guy who didn't want to take money from me," he said.

"Be careful how you speak to my husband," my wife told him. "He's a grandfather many times over, not just some 'guy.' You're just some guy yourself, and what's more, you're a guy who's *mechallel Shabbos!*"

"Ma'am, please take it easy," he said. "I didn't mean any offense. Tell her to take it easy," he said to me.

"Sir," I said, "I came here to say that I made a mistake the last time I was here. It seems that the *Sefer Chassidim* says that it's permissible to accept money from a *mechallel Shabbos*, and because I decided the halachah for myself, damage was done to the kollel. So I came to take back what I said..."

The man looked at me and said, "I'm really happy that you changed your mind. I was so insulted over what you said; it's such a relief to hear that I'm considered okay."

I couldn't believe my ears. Now he was happy. Because of what I just said, now he thought that he could be *mechallel*



Shabbos with a clean conscience. I could never allow such a thing to happen.

My wife looked at over at me and saw that I was crying.

The man noticed this as well. "Is everything all right?" he asked.

"No," I heard my wife say. "Everything isn't all right. We came here because we were ordered to pay a thousand dollars for the damage we caused to the kollel, and we wanted to repair that damage. But I know my husband, and I know he's not at peace with himself. Tell me, how can you be happy when you don't keep Shabbos? Even if some say it's permissible to accept a donation from you, there are others who say it's prohibited. Do you feel good about that? Your father is looking down at you from Heaven — do you think he'll have *nachas*? We don't want your money. Come," she said to me. "Let's go. HaKadosh Baruch Hu will get us the money to pay the kollel. If I have to clean the streets of Batei Ungarin, I'll do it, rather than let my husband have anything to do with *chillul Shabbos*."

She beckoned to me to get up, and I did. Knowing I wouldn't be forced to do anything that went against my conscience, I felt better already. My wife had infused strength into me.

We started walking out, and suddenly we heard the man say, "Wait a minute."

We stopped.

"What if I start keeping Shabbos again? Will you accept a donation from me then?"

"Certainly," I said. "Why not?"

"Let me think about it," he said.

And we left.

A few days later, who should come knocking at my door but the kollel manager. He was all excited. He sat down, ignoring the angry looks from my wife, and took out an envelope. From the envelope he took out a letter and started reading it to me. It was from the donor.

He wrote, "I've given to many different *mosdos* in my life, and I never thought I would have to beg anyone to accept my donation... Thanks to that guy you sent to collect from me, I've decided to keep Shabbos, and I hope I'll be strong enough to keep my resolution. Enclosed is my donation of \$5000 to your kollel, for a nice memorial to my father z"l. I am adding a second check for another \$5000 as a personal gift to the guy who came around, who seems to be in financial straits. I will also be happy to continue the regular donations my father z"l was giving to your institution."

The kollel manager handed me the check and said, "I'm sorry... I see that your innocence, which I was so scornful of, turned out to be a lot more powerful than all our worldliness. I'd like you to keep working for us; you'll bring us *berachah*."

I looked at my wife, expecting her consent — but her only response was: "Again, the *chutzpah*. I told him he'd better be careful how he refers to you. You're a grandfather many times over. Next time I'll make it very clear that if he calls you 'a guy' once more, he's in big trouble."

That's the story, Mr. Walder. And here is its message: If all the *meshulachim* who collect for institutions would hold their heads high and not make concessions to donors — certainly not concessions on *chillul Shabbos* — and instead, try to influence them to change their ways, people might give a lot

more than they're giving today, and then our *mosdos* wouldn't need any money from the Israeli government at all. And if we didn't need money from the government, then we could all stay away from the unholy elections — and we wouldn't need any loudspeakers to tell us that.



A Double Miracle

I've wanted to share this story for some time now, because I think it's a rare story and your readers can learn a lot from it.

My parents are very fine, *frum* people who raised us well. Our home was in the holy city of Jerusalem. We were a dream family.

Then, one of my bothers — I'll call him Dovi — started going astray. It started with some questionable friends. Then he seemed to be home much too often when all good boys were in *yeshivah*. He then changed the way he dressed and the way he spoke — eventually his whole conduct was not that of a nice, *frum* boy.

My parents tried to reach out to him. My mother *davened*, went to *rabbanim*, and lit candles for his sake, hoping all the time to see him back on the right path. My parents deliberated long and hard about the effect he might have on the other children — and there were many other children. It was painful to watch them struggle, but we admired them all the more for