



Wheels of Fortune

By Rav Paysach Krohn shlita (Shiur E22)

Some miracles are built into nature. Shabbos observance brings miracles, naturally.

Shabbos – unlike any other Mitzvah

Shabbos is a Mitzvah, inscribed in the עשרת הדברות and commanded to כלל ישראל forever. Its place in the minds of observant Jews is fixed.

As much as we think that we know about the holiness of Shabbos, there are aspects of Shabbos that are beyond our understanding. For example, the Gemara¹ tells us that widespread observance of Shabbos has the power to bring the Redemption to כלל ישראל. And, on the sad side, failure to observe Shabbos is a cause for our exile.² The spiritual centrality of Shabbos spills over into and impacts our daily mundane lives. Shabbos can be thought of as our 'secret weapon' when dealing with the challenges of day-to-day living. The relationship between Shabbos and our daily lives was captured by Ibn Ezra in his famous זמר. There he declares כי אשמרה שבת א-ל-י שמרני – As I preserve Shabbos, Hashem preserves me.

We might think of this expression as simply lyrical. But there are countless testimonies and anecdotes of the protection afforded by Shabbos observance. Ibn Ezra was not simply waxing poetic; he was describing a spiritual reality. The oft-told story of the late Sam Zeitlin is one such

account. While the story is known by many, I was blessed to be introduced to Sam by his daughter who was, at the time, studying at the Gateshead seminary in England. She gave me her father's number and I was able to hear the Sam Zeitlin story directly from Shimon Pesach Zeitlin ע"ה himself.

First the facts, then the story

*R' Noach
instructed Shimon
Pesach to learn
during first Seder
and to train
during second
Seder.*

When we recount a story with a strong element of השגחה פרטית in it, we must recognize that הקב"ה conceals His involvement in the world. That means that someone can look at the *facts* and interpret them without seeing the hand of Providence. The only time that הקב"ה revealed His involvement in a way that does not allow for any doubt

about His direct control over every aspect of our lives is when He took us out of מצרים and gave us the Torah. That was the once-and-for-all announcement that there is no such thing as a 'natural' event without His direction. Everything is His Will and Providence.³ From that time onward the facts do not reveal the story. The *story* is left for us to notice and reveal. One who has not internalized the lessons of יציאת מצרים will hesitate if not refuse to see any set of facts as proclaiming Hashem's involvement. And we

¹ שבת קיח:

² עיין ירמיהו פרק י"ז

³ ראה רמב"ן סוף פרשת בא



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do not argue. We see Hashem's Providence because we know that in His compassion, He runs every facet of our existence. There is only one set of facts that prove His השגחה. Every other set of facts is but a booster for those who know about יציאת מצרים.

The facts

In the 60's Sam Zeitlin was a talented, determined cyclist and a rising star in the US cycling world. He confronted intense anti-Semitism coming from every part of the cycling community, including from his own teammates. In 1966, on his way back to Brooklyn from training in Queens at Kissena Park, he was ridden off the street by a group of his teammates declaring their hatred for 'the Jew' as they did.

The 'icing on the cake' was in Northbrook, Illinois in 1967 when he was stripped of his title in the Grand Prix of the Americas because he raised his hands in victory at the end of the race. The never-enforced rule not to take one's hands off the handlebars was suddenly relevant when the winner was a Jew. Sam knew that there was no cycling future for him in the US.

He thought about Canada – too cold. He thought about Mexico – air is too thin for cycling. Israel made sense. He had already biked at the Maccabiah Games in Israel and was known there, so Israel it would be.

The cycling division of HaPoel Tel Aviv Sports Club was only too happy to welcome Sam. He gave the Israelis a hope that they could send a cycling team to the upcoming Olympics in 1972. They had never sent a cycling team before. Weightlifting, wrestling, and fencing teams had

gone, but never a cycling team. Sam could change that. And so, the intensive training got underway.

During his training, Sam, who had always been curious about Judaism, went to visit the Kosel. He only knew the Posuk of Shema, so he went with his Posuk and kissed the stones of the Wall.

Turning around, he was drawn to go over to two English-speaking Yeshiva Bochurim standing nearby. They turned out to be brothers from Chicago, Chaim and Dovid Goldberg (currently the Rosh Yeshiva of the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland) who were each learning in Brisk; Chaim by R' Dovid and Dovid by R' Berel Soloveitchik.

In the ensuing conversation the brothers sensed that Sam was sincerely interested in finding out more about Yiddishkeit and they referred him to Rav Gershon Weinberger. R' Gershon was an architect in Yerushalayim who opened his home as a home-away-from-home for Yeshiva and Seminary students who began coming to Israel after the Six-Day War. The Weinberger's welcomed Sam and he spent several Shabbos meals at their table. The Nigun that they sang for 'שבת היום לה' made an impression on Sam and became something of a theme song for him which resonated in his head often, reminding him continually of Shabbos.

A name change

Sam decided to intensify his Jewish identity by adopting his Jewish name, Shimon Pesach. R' Gershon Weinberger introduced him to Rav Noach Weinberg who was opening a Yeshiva in Bnei Brak called מגן אברהם. Shimon Pesach



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Discover the Joy
of Shabbos

related to me that he was the *fifth* student of the Rav who would go on to become a major force in the Ba'al Teshuva movement when he opened Aish HaTorah in Yerushalayim.

Bnei Brak, Rav Noach, and Training

R' Noach instructed Shimon Pesach to learn during first Seder in the Yeshiva and to train for three hours daily during second Seder. R' Noach envisioned the קידוש השם which could be generated if a Yarmulke-wearing young man stood up to receive an Olympic medal. Shimon Pesach took his newly defined mission seriously and worked hard at both parts of his day. It was easier to train in Bnei Brak which is flatter than Yerushalayim. In addition, there were many large trucks, often carrying tanks on board, on the highways near Bnei Brak and drafting (taking advantage of the air stream created by a moving vehicle) was a tempting way to build speed as well.

Trials on Shabbos

Shimon Pesach was crushed when the Israeli Olympic Federation announced that trials for the Olympic team would take place on Shabbos. The Federation was unbending, and Shimon Pesach had to make a choice. He would either tryout on Shabbos or he would not qualify for the Olympics. And if he would not qualify, there

was no chance for the rest of the cycling team and so they would not go either.

The painful decision

Shimon Pesach made the painful decision to put Shabbos ahead of his Olympic ambitions. He, and the rest of the cycling team, stayed behind. They did not go to Munich in 1972.

A tragic loss

On the 10th day of the Munich Olympics a group of Palestinian terrorists calling themselves Black September broke into the Olympic Village and attacked the Israeli team during their sleep. They killed two athletes at their residence and took nine others hostage. In the end, the Arabs killed all nine of their hostages. Eleven coffins were brought back to Israel and Shimon Pesach was struck by the awful reality of the fate from which he was saved.

כי אשמרה שבת א-ל ישמרני – the story

Shimon Pesach knew in his heart that there was a story behind the facts. He knew that his painful decision to protect and preserve Shabbos turned out to be that which protected and preserved him. Can we prove the significance of Shabbos observance? Not to others. But we know it deeply, and Shimon Pesach was testimony to the protection afforded by sacrificing for Shabbos.

Takeaway: I will try to see Shabbos as a dear friend who looks after me as I look after it.