

THE PAMME

As a *yeshivah bachur*, I have had occasion to take taxis from time to time and have formed a set of opinions about taxi drivers as a group — some of which I will now share with you.

If taxi drivers around the world are a knowledgeable group in general, Israeli taxi drivers are in a league of their own. Maybe it's because their passengers are so diverse; maybe it's because they sit in a car all day and listen to the news for hours at a time. Whatever the reason, it might be interesting if, as a social experiment, the government would exchange politicians and taxi drivers for a month — putting politicians both of the national and municipal variety behind the wheel of cabs, and taxi drivers into the Knesset and city halls around the country. The results might surprise everyone.

The other day I needed to go somewhere; I left my apartment and headed outside to hail a cab. A cab stopped for me a minute later and I got in. The driver had a nice smile and

Chocolate Chip Cookie Layered Cream Cake

(Yield: approx. 4-6 layered cookies)

Your kids will love these individual cakes with real whipped cream layers. They've got all the "wow" of a layered cake, minus the patchke!

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 tablespoon vanilla sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups chocolate chips
- ¾ cup (1½ sticks) margarine, melted
- 1 8-oz. (225 g) container whip
- 1 cup brown sugar
- A few drops food coloring of your choice
- ½ cup white sugar
- 1 egg

INSTRUCTIONS:

Preheat oven to 325°F (165°C) and line cookie sheets with parchment paper.

In a bowl, combine the flour, baking soda and salt. Set aside.

In the bowl of an electric mixer, cream together margarine and sugars until creamy. Beat in the eggs, and then mix in the dry ingredients. When everything is fully combined, mix in the chocolate chips. Shape into balls using less than ¼ cup dough and place on cookie sheets, spacing them 3 inches apart. Bake in preheated oven for 15-17 minutes.

Meanwhile, beat whip with food coloring until stiff.

When cookies are completely cool, pipe a ¼-inch thick layer of whipped cream on a cookie, top with another cookie, add another layer of whipped cream, and then another cookie. Eat immediately or store in the refrigerator or freezer.



Many ingredients are prone to infestation. Local Rabbanim should be consulted for specific guidelines on how to avoid transgressions related to insects.

PHLET

seemed very pleasant. Not all drivers are created equal. Some smile at you and project an “All Is Good With the World” attitude, while others are contemplative or morose or just uncommunicative. Different days, different people, different moods. People.



This driver was smiling as he welcomed me into his life, and it wasn't long before we were deep in conversation. When that happens I like to ask the drivers about themselves, where they grew up, their hobbies, where they served in the army. Funny thing how every driver you meet was the soldier who liberated the Kosel, or flew through the night to rescue the hostages in Entebbe.

Well, not this time.

“I didn't do anything special in the army,” the driver said in

response to my question.

“What did you do?”

“Worked in an office. It was a nothing job.”

The conversation meandered in different directions.

“I always liked learning Torah, though,” he said.

“That’s great,” I replied.

“Are you a *yeshivah bachur* who learns *Chumash*?”

“I am.”

“Really, I thought you *yeshivah bachurim* only learn *Gemara*.”

“*Gemara* is my main study, but I learn *Chumash* too.”

From there we moved on to something else and then on to something else. It was a long ride and a fascinating conversation. Suddenly he went into confiding mode (voice lowered as if to impart a major secret).

“For years I wanted to become more religious.”

“Really?”

“Yes, I knew the truth. I knew how important it was. But I couldn’t get myself to commit.”

“What was holding you back?”

“The cigarettes.”

“You’re a smoker?”

He nodded. “Unfortunately, too true. Not just me, my wife too. We’ve been smoking since we were teenagers and just thinking about doing without our cigarettes on Shabbat was enough to make me give up before I started. See, since I could never give up smoking on Shabbat, I knew that I’d never be religious, so there was no point in keeping everything else.”

“First of all, that’s not true,” I said. “There certainly is great value in fulfilling some of the *mitzvos* even if you are not ready to do every one of them. But regarding giving up the smoking, why couldn’t you at least try to go without them for one Shabbat?”

“Because I knew that it was impossible. There was no way I would ever be able to go a complete Shabbat without smoking, so I thought, why should I even start thinking about keeping Shabbat if I’d never be able to do that?”

“So what happened?”

He turned reflective. “What happened was really interesting. There I was one day, just driving along, thinking my thoughts and wishing I could become religious and committed to not smoking on Shabbat, when I found myself braking to a stop at a junction somewhere in the middle of

“EVEN IF YOU ARE ABLE TO CUT DOWN FROM 20 CIGARETTES TO 19 AND YOU DO IT FOR THE SAKE OF SHABBAT, THAT ALONE IS WORTH AN ENTIRE WORLD!”

the country.”

“What happened?”

“What happened was that I heard the music. You know those guys with the *peyos* who dance all over the country?”

“You mean the Na-Nach guys?”

“Yes.”

I nodded. Of course I knew about the Na-Nachs — who didn’t? I had seen their vans with the brightly painted picture of the “Sabba” and the words “Na-Nach-Nachma-Nachman-Me-Uman,” stenciled on the sides. I had heard their pulsing music and seen them dancing at traffic lights all over. Some of them dance in the street and some dance on the roof of their van. They are part and parcel of the Israeli landscape by now.

“Well, I heard their music,” he continued, “and when I got closer to the light, I was able to see one of their vans at the side of the road and a couple of them were dancing to the beat with their trademark enthusiasm and high spirits.

“Since there were a lot of cars in front of me, I didn’t make the light and ended up halted near the intersection and next to the gyrating guys with their swinging *peyos*, big smiles and white shirts. The music was really loud right there, but when one of the Na-Nach guys motioned to roll down the window, I didn’t have to hear him speak to understand what he wanted.

“How’s everything?’ he asked me, smiling.

“Great.”

“Here, take one of these,’ he said, offering a booklet from a box of little pamphlets.

“How much?”

“Nothing. It’s free. Just take a pamphlet.”

“What did I have to lose from taking

a free pamphlet, so I reached into the box to pull one out just as the light was turning green.

“Have a great day,’ he called to me.

“Thanks for the pamphlet.”

“He waved as I drove away, and I watched him in the rear-view mirror until he was out of sight and I couldn’t hear the music any longer. I dropped the booklet on the passenger seat and concentrated on the road, thinking about the dancing Chassid’s nice smile and happy eyes.

“I drove along for a few more minutes until I had to slow down again before the next traffic light. Because I was at the end of a long line of cars, I picked up the pamphlet given me not seven minutes earlier, propped it on the steering wheel and opened up to the first page, waiting for the light to change.

“This is what I read:

Do not say that just because you smoke 20 cigarettes every Shabbat that you shouldn’t become religious.

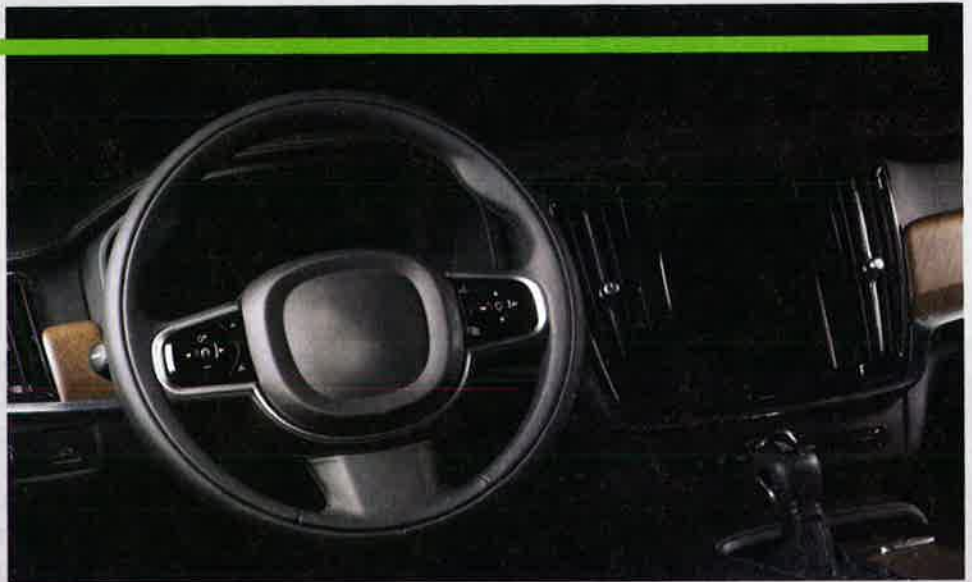
“I couldn’t believe what I was reading!”

Even if you are able to cut down from 20 cigarettes to 19 and you do it for the sake of Shabbat, that alone is worth an entire world!

“I was stunned. This booklet was addressing the exact reason I hadn’t become religious until now. I’d been telling myself that I couldn’t become religious unless I went *all the way, right away*, and since I couldn’t do that, there was no point in even trying to start. This pamphlet, on the other hand, said exactly the opposite. I should start trying to cut down on the cigarettes and I should do my best to keep Shabbat in mind, and I shouldn’t worry about whether I was going to succeed or not.

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autopilot. My mind was in turmoil, racing like the wheels of my car.

“Could I do it? Could I dare try to keep Shabbat? But what if it didn’t work?”

“‘At least you will have tried,’ I told myself.

...

“I really prepared for that Shabbat! I knew the challenge that awaited me and I was determined to do my best. Whether or not I succeeded was not in my power, but at least I would be able to say that I gave it my best shot. That Friday I went to the store and bought bags and bags of *garinim* and nuts. I also bought a huge stack of newspapers for us to read.

“As the sun began sinking toward the horizon I took a shower.

“‘What are you doing?’ my wife asked.

“‘Taking a shower,’ I said.

“‘Why?’

“‘I’m getting ready for Shabbat.’ She was surprised but accepted my answer.

I then donned a suit I normally reserved for weddings and *simchos*. As I entered the living room, my wife stared at me.

“‘Where are you going?’

“‘I’m going to the *beit kneset*.’

“‘Why?’

“‘I decided to go to the *beit kneset* tonight. No big deal.’ My wife didn’t really have a response to that, but she was taken

aback.

“So I went to the *beit kneset*, returned home and my wife and I settled down to our Friday night routine, which consisted of eating dinner, then retiring to the porch to smoke, nosh on sunflower seeds and to read the weekend papers.

“‘I want to try something tonight,’ I told her.

“‘What’s that?’ she replied.

“‘I want to try not smoking for an hour.’

“‘Why?’

“‘Because it’s Shabbat.’

“‘I guess we can try not to smoke for an hour,’ she agreed.

“We sat there and read our papers and chewed sunflower seeds. An hour passed. I could tell my wife was itching for a cigarette. For that matter, so was I.

“‘I know it’s a lot to ask, but do you think we can possibly try to go another hour without smoking?’ She sighed and looked at me as though I had lost my mind.

“‘Why?’

“‘I don’t know... I’m trying to keep Shabbat. Do you think we can go another hour?’

“‘If we must.’

“‘I picked up my paper and she picked up hers, cracking open the seeds at a quicker pace. The hour passed.

“‘I think I’m going to go to bed,’ I said at

“TO OUR UTTER AMAZEMENT, THE TWO OF US SUCCEEDED IN REACHING OUR GOAL.”

last, knowing that if I stayed up any longer, I was done for.

“It’s early!”

“I know, but I had a long week. I’m bombed.”

“Fine, so let’s make an early night of it.”

“She didn’t understand what was going on, but she was willing to humor me. I went to sleep and although I hadn’t gone to bed that early since I was 12, I fell asleep fairly quickly and slept the sleep of the just.”

“In fact, I slept so well (and I also didn’t want to get up in the morning because I knew that I would want to smoke and I was trying not to smoke...) so I forced myself to go back to sleep even after the sun had already been up for hours that Shabbat morning.”

“The upshot of all this was that the household only came awake at one in the afternoon. And since it was winter, Shabbat was going to end about five hours later.”

“Listen,’ I said to my wife, ‘we made it this far without smoking. What do you say we try our hardest not to smoke until the end of Shabbat? It would really mean a lot to me!’

“Seeing how serious I was about the not-smoking thing, my wife agreed to try it my way. To our utter amazement, the two of us succeeded in reaching our goal and not smoking until the end of Shabbat! It seemed like a miracle. Heaven was really helping us go the distance! There was no other explanation.”

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“And that,” said the taxi driver, “was how my wife and I ended up keeping Shabbat. You see, I was always afraid to start trying because I thought that starting meant I had to be perfect and could never make a mistake again. But the second I understood Hashem wanted me to try even if I might not make it, that all He wanted was for me to do my best — I was finally able to give it an honest go, which led to us eventually becoming completely *shomer Shabbat*. You understand?”

I assured the earnest man behind the wheel that I did indeed understand.

“Sometimes,” he concluded, “we need to be told that Hashem wants us to try even if we have no chance of success, and that can be enough to give us the push we need to go the whole way. Because it was only after I understood that the *Ribbono shel Olam* wanted me to try to keep Shabbat even if I hadn’t yet reached perfection, that I was actually able to keep Shabbat without one tiny puff.”

“And that’s the story...”

“Are you sure you weren’t one of the soldiers who liberated the Kosel?” I asked him. “Because you sure seem the type.”

He laughed, and in his laugh I saw a man who had fought the big fight and won. ■

As heard from the passenger in the cab.

COMPUTERS 101: IT'S A HARDWARE PROBLEM

In this day and age of computers doing everything for us, one of the few things that we still have to do manually is set up a new computer.

And this can be very confusing. So we might as well help each other through it.

I'm not saying you've never set up a computer.

Computers in fact have very short life spans. But most of them live just long enough for you to forget all the different steps you need to take to set them up. Yes, you probably have those steps written down somewhere, probably in your old computer, which you are *not* turning on again, because it moves like molasses.

"Why are you freezing? It's Microsoft Word!"

By the time you finish looking up the steps on your old computer, it will be time to get a *third* computer.

The first step in getting a new computer is to decide what is the best computer for you. Most computer experts will tell you that you have two basic choices: a desktop or a laptop. A laptop sits on your lap, although you can use it on a desk, and a desktop sits on a desk, although technically you can use it on your lap and the laps of maybe two other people. So there are more differences than just the names.

For example, one factor to consider is how many people generally stand behind you staring at the screen when you're on the computer. Especially when they're supposed to be in bed. With a laptop, there is generally one optimal angle to see the screen, so unless you want everyone cheek to cheek, you might want to get a desktop with a huge monitor. Your other option is to put all the other people on your lap, and then where will the laptop go?

And that's another difference: A laptop comes with a free monitor, but on the other hand, you're *married* to that monitor. If the monitor goes, you need a new computer. Whereas, for



example, I use desktops, and I'm still on my first two flat-screen monitors, and what is probably my eleventh computer.

The other benefit of desktops is that you can actually use one *without* a monitor, though it will involve a lot of guesswork. But it's definitely the best computer to buy in terms of *kashrus*.

And then there's the matter of price: One of the downsides of a laptop is that it's more expensive. On the other hand, one of the downsides of a desktop is that you have to buy a *desk* first. So that might come out to more in the long run. On the other hand, a desk has other uses. For example, you can eat lunch on it. You can't eat lunch on a laptop, unless you close it first.

On the other hand, when you need to, you can just shut the laptop and move it out of the way. Whereas with a desktop, the way it works is that it has its own room — your kids don't even have their own rooms — and it stays on from Shabbos to Shabbos. It's much harder to just schlep around when you need to.

YOU, AT A MEETING: "Let me show you what I'm talking about. One minute..."

COWORKER: "Can we help you plug things into the back?"

YOU, FROM UNDER THE CONFERENCE TABLE: "No, I've got this... Why do we only have two outlets down here?"

And that's another thing: With a desktop, you get to crawl around under the desk and plug in wires. With a laptop, I'm not sure *where* you're supposed to crawl. There's no desk.

Anyway, once you've chosen a computer, you need to bring it home — sometimes through several trips back and forth to the store — and put it all together. Setting up a computer is about much more than just plugging it in and turning it on.

First you want to call your father-in-law. Or at least *my* father-in-law. Technically, it doesn't have to be *anyone's* father-in-law, but there should probably be someone in your