

For it had not been clarified what should be done with him. (15:34)

They knew that one who profanes the *Shabbos* is put to death. They were just unclear as to the nature and procedure of the execution. In an alternative exposition, the commentators state that actually they were well aware of the type of execution which is meted out to a *mechallel Shabbos*, one who desecrates *Shabbos*. Nonetheless, they were uncertain as to what to do with the *mekoshesh eitzim*, the man who gathered wood on *Shabbos*. Why? It seems that the *mekoshesh's* intentions were noble. He wanted the people to realize the seriousness of *Shabbos* desecration. They should know that one who desecrates *Shabbos* is put to death.

We now understand their overriding concern about executing a fellow Jew who got carried away with his zeal for conveying the critical nature of *Shabbos*. Perhaps such a Jew should not be executed. After all, he acted *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven. He was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to impart a message concerning the sanctity of *Shabbos*. Should we not be lenient with such a person?

There is a flipside to this argument, one that is becoming more compelling, as we see people of all ilk resonating to this form of excuse for committing every type of sin and immorality. "It is *l'shem Shomayim*" has become a rationale to justify the most deplorable activities. "How else can we reach out to them?" "If we do not get into the mud with them, they will never give us the time of day" and other such excuses. *L'Shem Shomayim* is not an excuse for transgressing the Torah.