

## On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you... whoever does work on it shall be put to death. (35:2)

In the previous *parshah* (*Ki Sisa*), the Torah addressed the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos* observance, detailing the punishment for its desecration. Why does the Torah reiterate it yet again in this *parshah* (*Vayakhel*)? Furthermore, if the primary point is to prevent us from working on the seventh day, why does the Torah preface it by saying, “Six days you shall work”? Why not get to the point? *Horav Tzvi Pesach Frank, zl*, quotes his brother-in-law, *Horav Aryeh Levine, zl*, who heard the following explanation from a well-known *gaon*, Torah scholar.

At the beginning of *Meseches Pesachim*, *Tosfos* explains why the Torah is more stringent with regard to the prohibition of *chametz* on *Pesach* than with other prohibitions which are *assur b’hanaah*, forbidden to have pleasure from them. *Chametz* must be destroyed prior to *Pesach*. One may not keep *chametz* in his possession. This is unlike other *issurim*, prohibitions, in which the object of the *issur* does not have to be destroyed. **Tosfos** explains that other prohibitions are perpetually forbidden. *Chametz*, however, is permitted throughout the rest of the year. Its prohibition is in effect for only the eight/seven days of *Pesach*. Man is used to refraining from other prohibitions. Thus, the Torah prefaces the prohibition of *Shabbos* with the fact that we are accustomed to working six days a week. This might cause us to forget that *Shabbos* is different. The Torah adds the reasons for this stringency. In order to keep us aware of the prohibitions of *Shabbos*; and explain why the Torah repeats the prohibition.

The commentators wonder why the Torah precedes the commandment concerning the *Mishkan*’s construction with the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos*. Indeed, in *Parashios Terumah*, *Tetzaveh* and *Ki Sisa*, the instructions regarding the *Mishkan* precede that of *Shabbos*. Veritably, why does the Torah repeat the prohibition against work on *Shabbos*? In his *Devash L’Fi*, the **Chida** offers an insightful explanation which goes to the very core of sinful behavior and grants us a perspective for understanding the mindset of the sinner. The *Talmud Shabbos* 118b states, “One who observes *Shabbos* according to *halachah* (properly) – even if he had worshipped idols as was done during the generation of Enosh – Hashem will forgive his past sins.” This is the power associated with *shemiras Shabbos*.

The **Bais Yosef** explains why *Shabbos* has such an immense power to catalyze atonement for the sin of idol worship, which is ostensibly an unpardonable infraction. *Shabbos* is equal to all of the *mitzvos* in that its observance demonstrates one’s belief in Hashem as the Creator of the world and its Supreme Guide. A *Shabbos*-observant Jew demonstrates that he believes Hashem to be the G-d of Creation, as well as the G-d of History. He believes that Hashem is the Divine Author of the Torah. If so, how could he worship an idol, which is inconsistent with his belief? Obviously, he does not really believe in the idol or in what he is doing. It might be peer pressure, acting under the influence of a depraved environment, but he is not acting with malice or with a rejection of the

Divine. Therefore, there is room for forgiveness. He has not completely severed his ties to Hashem.

The *Chida* suggests that this is why *Parashas Ki Sisa* precedes the sin of the Golden Calf. We are being taught that, even if one were to sin with the *eigel ha'zahav*, Golden Calf, through the medium of *Shabbos* he may seek atonement for his sin. Indeed, this was the sin of the generation of Enosh. They thought that, since G-d created the constellations that were so powerful, they, too, should be revered and accorded a certain degree of divinity. They did not mean to deny Hashem as G-d, but only to add honor to His close adjutants. This was the error of their misguided belief. Such erroneous belief can achieve atonement through *shemiras Shabbos*. *K'motzei Shalal Rav* cites the *Tzitz Eliezer*, where its author, **Horav Eliezer Yehudah Valdenberg, zl**, employs this logic to explain a question raised by the *Mechilta* in *Parashas Ki Sisa*, and also discussed in the *Talmud Yoma* 85a. The *Taanaim* ask: From where do we derive the *halachah* that *pikuach nefesh*, saving a life, is *docheh*, supersedes, the prohibition of *Shabbos*. Various responses are given. Ostensibly, this is not a question that is applicable specifically to *Shabbos*. Indeed, every *mitzvah* in the Torah – barring the three capitol sins of idol worship, murder and adultery – is vitiated by *pikuach nefesh*. Why would we require a specific *pasuk* for *Shabbos*, more so than any other *mitzvah* in the Torah?

*Rav Valdenberg* explains that one who desecrates *Shabbos* is tantamount to one who worships an idol. Therefore, had we not had a special medium for deriving that *pikuach nefesh* is *docheh Shabbos*, we might conjecture that, indeed, it does not. *Shabbos* is like idol worship, which is not overridden by the requirement to save a life. Just like one must give up his life rather than worship an idol, so, too, should he die rather than desecrate *Shabbos*. This is why we need a special proof to circumvent this notion.

Incidentally, we derive two important lessons herein. First, the value of Jewish life takes precedence over all the *mitzvos*. *Shabbos* is equal to all the *mitzvos*, and we move it aside when human life is in danger. There is nothing as important as the life of a Jew. Second, we see that sin has its degrees. There are sinners who sin because they are influenced by others – not because they believe in what they are doing. They do not choose maliciously to rebel against Hashem. They are weak! Sadly, there are those who have strayed far beyond this degree and those who maliciously or foolishly believe that what they are doing is correct and proper. We can only pray that one day they will realize the error of their false beliefs and acknowledge the truth.

As noted, the power of *Shabbos* is incredible. It is unlike any other *mitzvah*. *Shabbos* is much more than the negation from work, it is a holy experience. It is an opportunity to spend a day immersed in the Divine. **Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita**, posits that the observance of *Shabbos* has a special healing power, through which one cleanses his psyche from any impious, revisionist thoughts. Questions which often undermine one's conviction and ultimate commitment are ameliorated through sincere *Shabbos* observance. People often err in defining Judaism as the religion of "no," thus engendering a sense of negativity regarding Jewish belief and observance. It cannot be further from the truth. One only has to experience the beauty of a *Shabbos*, sense the

calm and feel the spiritual emotion generated by the day of rest. Regrettably, when *Shabbos* is painted as a day of negativity, when one may not do “this and that,” the beauty is somehow lost.

The **Brisker Rav, zl**, took every *mitzvah* very seriously. Torah was his life. *Shabbos*, however, generated within him a sense of fear like no other. The mere thought that he might in some way skirt the transgression of *Shabbos* terrified him more than anything else. At the beginning of World War II, the *Brisker Rav* had to travel from Moscow to Odessa, the departing point for ships traveling to *Eretz Yisrael*. It was a two- day trip, with the next train scheduled to depart on Wednesday. This would hopefully allow him to arrive in enough time before *Shabbos*. The Russian train system was not known for its punctuality, and this terrified the *Rav*. What if the train was late and arrived on *Shabbos*? They would be compelled to disembark on *Shabbos*, thereby desecrating the holy day.

The *Rav* deliberated about what he should do. It was a matter of life and death if he were to remain in war-torn Europe. On the other hand, *Shabbos* was something he could not ignore. In the end, with much trepidation, the *Brisker Rav* together with the *Mirrer Rosh Yeshivah*, *Horav Eliezer Yehudah Finkel, zl*, set out together on the train.

The train had traveled only a few hours, when the *Rav* looked at his watch and noted that they were already quite behind schedule. If the train continued at this pace, they would arrive on *Shabbos*. The mere thought of such a possibility caused the *Rav* great anxiety. He tensed up and could think about nothing else. Those who had traveled with him on that train remarked later on that mere words could not describe the dread that enveloped him concerning the possibility of *chillul Shabbos*.

The train continued to fall farther and farther behind schedule. It soon became apparent that there was no way it would reach Odessa before *Shabbos*. Suddenly, the train began to pick up steam and gained momentum, roaring down the tracks at a speed unheard of in Russia. The train pulled into the station a full half-hour before *Shabbos*. The *Mirrer Rosh Yeshivah* commented that the *Brisker Rav* had catalyzed a miracle of *kefitzas ha'derech*, shortening the road. His unabiding love for *Shabbos*, his overwhelming fear and anguish concerning the possibility of being *mechallel*, desecrating, *Shabbos*, interceded with Heaven to cause this miracle to occur.

As they disembarked the train, those accompanying him suggested they take a taxi to the village of their destination. The *Brisker Rav* demurred, saying, “One miracle is enough.” They had no choice but walk forty-five minutes in the accompaniment of a gentile who carried their luggage. That *Motzoei Shabbos* they boarded the ship which took them to *Eretz Yisrael*.