

You shall be holy... every man: your father and mother shall you revere and My Shabbosos shall you observe. I am Hashem. (19:2,3)

It was 1945 and *Horav Moshe David Tenenbaum, zl*, who was then head of the *Vaad HaYeshivos* in the Holy Land, went for a vacation in a small village in the north. As he was walking one day, a member of a nearby *kibbutz* approached him and asked if he could serve as the tenth man for a *minyan*. At first, he thought the fellow was teasing him, since it was a non-religious *kibbutz* and *tefillah b'tzibur*, *davening* with a *minyan*, was uncommon (to say the least). How surprised he was when he arrived at the *kibbutz* to meet the other members of the *minyan*. His surprise increased when he discovered that they were not *davening*, but rather, performing a *Bris Milah*, circumcision ceremony. The *mohel*, ritual circumciser, was a fellow in shorts, who did not appear to be observant. Nonetheless, the *mohel* recited the blessings fluently and performed the circumcision flawlessly, with apparent skill.

Immediately following the ceremony, *Rav Moshe David* approached the *mohel* and asked him where he had practiced to become such a specialist in *Bris Milah*. The man explained that he used to be a *Vishnitzer Chasid* and had for years been a *mohel* in Vishnitz. Upon arriving in *Eretz Yisrael*, his relationship with Hashem had waned, and once he joined the *kibbutz*, he had naturally become estranged from Jewish observance. Nonetheless, he still retained his skill as a *mohel*, which he employed when needed.

They finished their conversation, and *Rav Moshe David* was about to leave when the father of the infant came over and made a request: "We have an elderly grandfather who – due to his failing health – was unable to attend the ceremony. I am sure that it would mean the world to him if you could visit with him a moment and extend a *bircas mazel tov*." *Rav Moshe David* was only too happy to hearten an elderly Jew. He went to the home and met the grandfather, who was confined to a wheelchair. He sat down next to him and began a conversation. He introduced himself as hailing from *Yerushalayim* where he was a *chasid* of *Karlin*. As soon as he mentioned his connection with *Karlin*, the grandfather's eyes perked up, and he said, "I must tell you a story.

"I emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* from Germany, where I had lived an assimilated lifestyle (as did many German Jews who had fallen under the influence of the scourge of *Haskalah*, Enlightenment.) One Friday night, my friend informed me that a *Chassidic Rebbe* – *Horav Yisrael Perlow, zl* (known as the *Yenukah* and *Der Frankfurter*, because he was buried in Frankfurt, Germany), had arrived in Germany for health reasons. *Chassidic Rebbes* were not common in Germany and certainly not in Berlin. We felt it would be an interesting sight (a *Rebbe* conducting his *Tish*, festive *Shabbos* meal, surrounded by his *Chassidim* around a large table). I already owned a car, so we drove over to where the *Rebbe* was conducting his *Tish* (on *Shabbos*).

"We entered the large room to see the *Rebbe* about to speak. 'I rarely speak Torah thoughts at

the *Shabbos Tish*,' the *Rebbe* began. 'Since I am a guest visiting Berlin, however, I will change my custom and say *divrei Torah*.' That *Shabbos* was *Parashas Kedoshim*. It has been quite some time, and I have gone through much since that time. Nonetheless, I was so impacted by the holy *Rebbe's* words, I remember them as if they were today. The *Rebbe* began with the opening words of the *parsha*, *Kedoshim tiheyu*, 'You shall be holy.' He then quoted the rest of the *pasuk* and the next; the Torah's enjoinder to revere parents, followed by the commandment to observe *Shabbos*, with the closing words – 'I am Hashem.'

"What is the relationship between these statements?' the *Rebbe* asked. 'It all depends on to whom one is speaking. To my *Chassidim* (G-d-fearing Torah-observant Jews), it is sufficient to simply say to them – "You shall be holy." However, there are Jews for whom this is almost too much to ask (being that they are no longer religiously-connected with Hashem). To them, the Torah says, "Every man: your father and mother shall you revere." If you are no longer observant, then at least do what your parents did. Surely, there must have been a semblance of Jewish observance at home. Attempt to maintain old family practices (as a way of holding onto Judaism). As long as one holds on, there is hope. Sadly, there are Jews who have distanced themselves, so that they are not prepared to observe all of the practices that were part of their life growing up at home. To them the Torah admonishes: at least keep My *Shabbos*. That much you do remember.'

"I thought it was over, when, suddenly, the *Rebbe* raised his voice, banged on the table and declared, 'From you, Jews of Berlin, even that we cannot expect. (You have gravitated away so far, distancing yourselves from ritual observance, parental customs, even the basics, like *Shabbos*.) You should at least remember, "*Ani Hashem*, I am Hashem! Remember that there is a Creator Who guides this world!"

"The *Rebbe's* pounding on the table set off a pounding in my heart. At that time, I had a daughter who was engaged to marry a gentile (that was Berlin in those days. Sadly, it was not uncommon). I did not need more. The *Rebbe's* pounding continued to pound in my chest. I dropped everything, and within a week, I was on a boat to *Eretz Yisrael*. If you saw today a grandchild of mine receive a *Bris Milah*, it is only because I attended the *Rebbe's Tish*. That night's pounding of *Ani Hashem* has been my conscience throughout these years."

The casual spectator who sees such a non-observant man does not take the time to wonder if there is another side to the story. He might easily disregard the many grandfathers we all often see. Do we ever stop to think: Why? Why is he like this? What was his background: Who turned him off? Was he ever turned on? What kind of life did he have? I meet such people every week in various settings. Some never had a chance. Some were even raised Orthodox but assimilated when they went off to school. For some it was financial, peer pressure, ignorance, lack of interest, but everyone has a story. We must never forget this. We must never judge – because, who knows, if given similar circumstances, whether we would have acted differently – or even worse?