

G-d blessed the seventh day. (2:3)

The Midrash relates that once the Roman Caesar went out for a stroll. In the course of walking, he entered the Jewish neighborhood. It was Shabbos, and the aroma of delicious Shabbos foods permeated the air. The Caesar was enchanted by the essence. He sent for Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, a leading sage, and asked, "Why do the Jewish foods have such a savory fragrance to them? I have never smelled anything so delectable." Rabbi Yehoshua replied, "We have a unique spice called Shabbos that creates a sweet aroma in our food."

"Please obtain this spice for me, so that I can also partake of it and enjoy my food," the Caesar requested.

"I am sorry, my Caesar, but this spice is available only to he who observes the Shabbos. One who does not observe Shabbos does not benefit from its aroma."

I feel this Midrash is conveying a critical lesson regarding mitzvah observance in general. One cannot grasp the profound delight captured through mitzvah observance unless he experiences the observance firsthand. In attempting to reach out to the unaffiliated, one does not succeed by arguing his point, since each individual feels that his is the correct approach. The proper method is to learn with the individual, to get him actively involved, so that he directly experiences the ideas that we want to transmit. Once he learns, his ability to see what we see is enhanced. He no longer needs explanation; he has his own experiences.

What if this approach does not work? What if he learns, and it does not change him? What if his

character remains the same as it had been before? The Dubno Maggid, zl, addresses this question and responds, in his imitable manner, with a parable:

A salesman arrived in a city with his case of samples, which he mistakenly left in the train station. When he checked into the hotel, he asked the bellboy to please arrange to have his suitcase retrieved from the station. The bellboy asked, "How much does it weigh, since if it is heavy, it will cost more to pick it up?"

"It is very light, only about five pounds," the salesman replied.

A few hours later, the bellboy appeared at the salesman's room, exhausted, sweaty and reasonably upset. "You told me the suitcase was light. It must weigh at least sixty pounds! Can you imagine how difficult it has been for me to carry it all they way here?"

The salesman looked at the boy incredulously and asked, "Are you sure that bag weighs sixty pounds and not five pounds?"

"I am absolutely certain," the bellboy replied.

"Then, young man, you have brought me the wrong suitcase. My bag weighs no more than five pounds. If you are exhausted, it is because you have the wrong bag!"

A parallel idea applies to Torah study. If after studying Torah, one has not changed, his character remains as deficient as it was before, then there is something very wrong with the manner in which he is learning. It is not the right package. This applies equally to mitzvah observance. If one does not sense a change after he has experienced the mitzvah, then he did not experience it correctly – or his response to experiencing the mitzvah was flawed.

There are some things that simply cannot be conveyed verbally; they must be experienced personally in order to be effective. There are certain emotions that the human psyche must experience before the mind can accept them intellectually. Horav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, zl, the legendary menahel of Mesivta Torah Vodaath, was an individual who did not simply perform or observe mitzvos; he lived them. Carrying out a mitzvah was an experience that penetrated his entire essence. Once, as a group of his students returned from Tashlich on Rosh Hashanah, Rav Shraga Feivel summoned them to come over. He was already sick at the time, nearing the end of his life. He said to them, "After an entire day of davening, I still do not feel that I have reached the level of Malchiyos, of declaring the total sovereignty of Hashem. Please help me. Perhaps together we might arouse ourselves to sense a taste of Malchiyos."

He then began to sing slowly from the Rosh Hashanah davening: V'yeida kol pa'ul ki Atah Po'alto, "Let everything that has been made know that You are his Creator," drawing the students into the niggun, melody, with him. They sang one niggun after another, and then Rav Shraga Feivel drew them into a dance to the words, V'al kein nekaveh Lecha, "Therefore we put our trust in You." They sang and danced with pure ecstasy. When they concluded, Rav Shraga Feivel thanked his students for helping him to achieve his goal. The students also achieved a goal as tears of hisorerus, spiritual arousal, streamed down their faces. They had gone beyond reciting the words; they had experienced the declaration of Hashem's sovereignty.