

You shall observe My commandments and perform them. (22:31)

Rashi explains the verbs in this *pasuk* practically: *u'shmartem*, "You shall observe," as referring to *Mishnah*, study; and *va'asisem*; "and perform them," as an enjoinder to action, to carrying out *mitzvos*. In contrast, the *Chasam Sofer*, *zl*, approaches the verb "*u'shmartem*," homiletically. *U'shmartem*, "You shall guard them," as we find concerning Yaakov *Avinu's* understanding of Yosef's dream; *V'aviv shamar es ha'davar*, "And his father kept the matter in mind" (*Bereishis* 37:11). Our Patriarch anticipated the results of the dream. He guarded it, anticipating its outcome. Thus, the Torah teaches us that it is not enough to merely execute the *mitzvah*; it is vital that we anxiously anticipate the opportunity to perform the *mitzvah*. We wait for it, yearn to perform it. This is the meaning of observance: vitality, excitement, anticipation and longing.

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, *zl*, portrays how this attitude plays itself out in our daily lives. When the alarm clock rings, we arise from bed knowing that soon we will be able to put on our *Tefillin* and *daven* to Hashem. We are excited and actually count the minutes to that moment. The flipside is one with which we are all quite familiar. The alarm clock rings, and we look at the time, thinking to ourselves, "How much more sleep can I squeeze out?" Perhaps if we cut back on the coffee we can sleep longer and still come to *shul* in time to *daven*.

I recently had the *zechus* to watch my grandson put on *Tefillin* for the first time under the direction of *Horav Binyamin Elyashiv*, *Shlita*. It took place in a small, quaint *shul* which houses the *Tiferes Bachurim Yeshivah*, which the *gaon* directs. We all arose early and threaded our way down the winding streets of Meah Shearim. We were asked to be there at 6:10 a.m. We were there much earlier, waiting with bated breath for *Rav Elyashiv's* entrance. The air was filled with anticipation and excitement, knowing that the first time one puts on *Tefillin* leaves a powerful impact – for the rest of one's life. That was the *brachah*, blessing, that he received, "You should always put on *Tefillin* this way." Every day – every *mitzvah* – should be a privilege, an honor, an unprecedented opportunity.

Imagine the Jews, Holocaust survivors, who – after years of physical, emotional and spiritual deprivation – finally had the opportunity to renew their active bond with Hashem. How they put on *Tefillin*!

Horav Aharon Kohen, *zl*, was *Rosh Yeshivah* in Chevron. A brilliant *gaon* and *tzaddik*, he devoted himself to his work, despite being frail and sickly throughout most of his life. *Horav Yechezkel Sarne*, *zl*, was his brother-in-law. At his funeral, *Rav Sarne* related that he once asked his brother-in-law from where he was able to conjure up the strength to arise from his

bed every day. *Rav Kohen* replied that, indeed, he had no strength to get up. When he remembered where he was going, however, that it was time to *daven* to Hashem, this realization

“lifted” him from his bed and propelled him to the *bais hamedrash*. When one maintains the proper attitude of *u’shemartem*, the *va’asisem* is a natural and successful progression.

Rav Reuven Karlinstein views *u’shemartem mitzvosai* as an admonition to guard the quality of *mitzvah* observance, to see to it that every *mitzvah* is performed to perfection, with the correct attitude and proper devotion, with joy and aforethought. He quotes *Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl*, who explains the *pasuk* in *Shemos* 12:17, *U’shemartem es ha’matzos*, “And you shall guard/watch the *matzos*,” in a novel manner. *Chazal* (*Mechilta*) derive from here – *Mitzvah ha’baah l’yadcha al tachmitzenah*, “Do not allow a *mitzvah* which comes into your hands (if the opportunity to perform a *mitzvah* arises) to become *chametz*/leaven (Do not tarry in its performance. Act with haste to carry out the *mitzvah*.)” Why is it that *Chazal* chose this *pasuk* specifically to teach this lesson? It is not as if there are no other places in the Torah from where we may derive the critical importance of not allowing a *mitzvah* to fester, to carry it out as soon as possible.

Rav Sholom explains that *matzah* is unique in that it is unnecessary to do anything whatsoever to create *chametz* from *matzah*. All one needs to do is – nothing. Let it sit and become leaven. Thus, it is specifically here that the Torah emphasizes the need not to allow an opportunity to perform a *mitzvah* to sour. One should be acutely aware that in order to destroy a *mitzvah*, to lose it forever, it is not necessary to act in a negative manner against it. All one needs is to do nothing, to sit back complacently and take his sweet little time in getting his act together, during which the opportunity for *mitzvah* performance dissipates. If one does not apply himself to the *mitzvah*, he loses it.

The *Alshich HaKadosh* wonders why the Torah speaks almost redundantly, saying, “You shall observe, and perform.” Is observance not performance? He explains that with every *mitzvah* that a Jew performs, he creates a Heavenly *Malach*, Angel. If the *mitzvah* that he performs is carried out without devotion, aforethought, passion, excitement; if his actions are insipid, lacking any feeling, almost sickly – the Angel he creates will be identical to the *mitzvah*. The “quality” of the Angel that he creates mimics the quality of his *mitzvah* performance. Obviously, one who performs a *mitzvah* properly, with devotion and passion, creates an Angel that will be favorable to him. Thus, the Torah writes: “You shall observe My *mitzvos*,” and the manner in which you observe the *mitzvos* creates the enduring quality of the *mitzvah*: “You will make the mitzvah,” giving it the power to protect you and stand in your behalf. We reap what we sow.