

“The Bnei Yisrael shall observe the Shabbos.” (31:16)

Shabbos observance is a foundation of our faith. It is a sign of our commitment to the Almighty and His Torah. In his sefer, M'loh Ha'omer, the Aruch L'ner notes an intriguing phenomenon. Those years that the first day of Rosh Hashanah was on Shabbos, Klal Yisrael either experienced its most wonderful years or its most tragic years. Indeed, our greatest national tragedies, the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash and the most devastating pogroms against our People, occurred during years when Rosh Hashanah fell on Shabbos. Why is this? The answer given by the Aruch L'ner, based upon a penetrating analogy, should open our eyes to the overwhelming significance of Shabbos Kodesh.

When the beginning of the year falls on Shabbos, then Shabbos may serve as an advocate in our behalf, as a merit for us to enjoy a healthy and joyous year. There are years that Hashem listens carefully to Shabbos', pleas in our behalf and grants us our wish. Some years, however, Shabbos' pleas are to no avail. It all depends upon one stipulation: how we treat that Shabbos. We explain with the following parable:

One of the officers of a king was found guilty of an offense that carried the sentence of the death penalty. People tried to have his sentence commuted, but to no avail. The king refused to listen to even his closest advisors. The officer was to die. The defendant's wife was a seamstress who sewed the king's royal garments. Due to her unique profession, she had special access to the king. She told her husband, "Do not worry. I will intercede with the king to release you." She went to the king and threw herself at his feet. "Please my king, grant my husband a reprieve. I have no one else. You know, my lord, that I am the royal seamstress. If my husband dies as a result of your decree, I will no longer be able to serve you." Lo and behold, that which all of the lawyers and officers could not accomplish, the condemned man's wife achieved. His sentence was commuted and he was free to go home.

A few months later, a similar offense was perpetrated by another officer. His punishment was the same, death. This officer's wife also had a royal position. She figured that she would also prevail on the king, as the previous officer's wife had successfully argued her husband's case. She went before the king and pleaded on her husband's behalf. Alas, she was not successful, and her husband was executed.

What happened? The officers in the royal court were stymied. Why did the king listen to the pleas of the first wife and not of the second? The Aruch L'ner explains that while the second wife was just as sincere as the first, the king took note of the marks on her face that unfortunately were caused by her abusive husband. The king told her that he wanted her to return, to continue her much needed work for the royal household. That is why he chose to have her husband executed, before his continued abusive behavior became responsible for her death.

This is the reason that during some years Shabbos can be our advocate. Only if we treat Shabbos properly, if we observe its laws, if we sanctify it, if we hold it dear and precious, can it intercede on

our behalf. When we abuse, neglect and reject Shabbos, when it is no more holy than a regular weekday, it cannot testify on our behalf. In fact, some people view Shabbos as the “fun day,” the day when they go out and act in a manner unbecoming such a holy day. Under such circumstances, Shabbos is the abused wife who, rather than interceding, points an accusing finger at us. We should remember that the way we act during the present year will effect a like response in the coming year.