

## Safeguard the day of Shabbos to sanctify it. (5:12)

The vernacular of this *pasuk* is ambiguous. If *Shabbos* is holy, why do we have to sanctify it? It is already holy. If it is a *mitzvah* like all *mitzvos*, one that imbues us with its *kedushah*, holiness, what role does remembering play in the scheme of *shemiras Shabbos*, *Shabbos* observance? Perhaps we may suggest the following: secular society recognizes that *Shabbos* is designated for the Jewish People as a day of rest. This does not necessarily mean that they view it as a day replete with unusual holiness. The *kedushah* is something that we infuse into the *Shabbos*. Otherwise, it is nothing more than an off-day, a day to rest from work, even attend services in the local synagogue; but that is the extent of it.

How does remembering fit into the equation? Well, there was a time when *Shabbos* was a critical *mitzvah*, just like all of the rest. Then along came the secularists who relegated *Shabbos*, together with most other *mitzvos*, to the dung heap of antiquity. Suddenly, we had no recollection of *Shabbos*. It is a new world, and, sadly, *Shabbos* does not play an active role in it. Furthermore, even those who remember *Shabbos* – are they remembering to keep it holy? Are they sanctifying *Shabbos*, or is it simply a day off from work, a day to catch up on relationships and much needed rest?

Rabbi Zakai was a great *Tanna* who lived to be four hundred years old. When he was queried by his students, *Bameh he'erachta yamim*, "In what merit were you blessed with such incredible longevity?" he replied, "You should know that I never missed having wine in honor of *Shabbos kodesh*. One *erev Shabbos*, my mother noticed that the wine cellar was empty; she sold her head-covering and used the proceeds to purchase a large amount of wine. When she died, she bequeathed to me three hundred barrels of wine." Rabbi Zakai left three hundred barrels of wine for his children and grandchildren. He attributed his blessing to the *pasuk*, *Likras Shabbos lechu v'nelcha ki hee mekor habrachah*, "Let us go greet the *Shabbos*, for she is the source of all blessing."

Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, *zl*, prepared his *Shabbos* table early on Friday. One of his *talmidim*, students, questioned him concerning this custom. His response was: "My father-in-law, the illustrious **Ridvaz**, was once very ill. At the lowest point of his illness, as he lay between life and death, he turned his head upward and whispered. He concluded his whispering, turned to his wife, and said, "Prepare the *Shabbos* table. You should know, my wife, that the only thing that can save me is that we prepare the *Shabbos* very early. I spoke to Hashem and pleaded, 'Hashem, I wrote a commentary on the entire *Yerushalmi*. If You will allow me to live, I promise to write a commentary on *Talmud Bavli*.' When I saw that this offer did not elicit a positive response, I realized that there was only one merit that would pull me through – *Shabbos* – *hiddur Shabbos*, beautifying the *Shabbos*, is my only chance."

It is the same old cliché: man thinks that he observes *Shabbos* almost as if he is doing Hashem a favor by taking time off from his busy work week and dedicating one day to Hashem. He forgets

that more than he (thinks he) does for *Shabbos* – *Shabbos* is doing for him.

The *Rama*, *zl*, *Horav Moshe Isserlis*, was an undisputed *Gaon*. Indeed, the Heavenly Angel that studied Torah with the *Bais Yosef* instructed him to write his *Shulchan Aruch*, Code of Jewish Law, because there was a great *Gaon* in Poland who was writing such a commentary on the *Tur Shulchan Aruch*. How did the *Rama's* father – who, for all intents and purposes, was a simple, G-d-fearing (although not so simple) Jew – merit to have such an illustrious son born to him? Apparently, the *Rama's* father owned a store which sold silk material. He had a weekly ritual such that, regardless of the workload, he closed his store every Friday afternoon at *chatzos*, midday, in order to prepare for *Shabbos*. One Friday, a wealthy customer visited the store fifteen minutes before closing time. He was prepared to purchase a large amount of silk, a purchase which would have rendered the *Rama's* father a substantial profit. At precisely twelve o'clock he told the customer that he must close the store. The man could not believe that this Jew was prepared to relinquish the deal of a lifetime due to some medieval religious observance. The customer warned him that, if he closed, he would not return and, thus, the storekeeper would forfeit an incredible profit. Naturally, the *Rama's* father was in a quandary concerning what he should do. In the end, he told the customer that he answered to a Higher Power and must close the store. He lost the profit, but gained a son that illuminated the Torah world for generations to come.

One more story! *Horav Chaim Pinto* is a distinguished Torah scholar residing in Ashdod. His father, *Rav Moshe Aharon*, was a well-known *tzaddik*, holy and righteous man. *Rav Chaim* was born on a Friday, with the *Bris* set for the following *Erev Shabbos*. Sadly, tragedy struck the Friday of the *Bris*, when his mother entered the room and noticed that her infant had stopped breathing. She came running to her husband, who calmly instructed her that the *Shabbos* Queen would soon come to visit, and they were, therefore, forbidden, to weep or grieve. Furthermore, she was to tell no one that their child had died.

His wife was a righteous woman in her own right and agreed to remain stoic throughout the *Shabbos*. They covered the infant with a white sheet and kept the door closed. Shortly before *Shabbos*, a number of well-wishers visited to convey their blessing of *mazel tov* to the new parents. The *rabbanis* smiled and thanked them for their good wishes. When they asked to see the child, she replied that presently it was not a good time.

Wonder of wonders! Miracle of miracles! *Motzoei Shabbos*, *Rav Aharon* told his wife to enter the room where their newborn infant lay covered in a white sheet. "You have been given a gift," he said to her. "You guarded the *Shabbos*, making sure that its sanctity was not in any way impugned. Hashem has rewarded you in kind. Now, your *simchah*, joy, for which you were hoping, will not either be impugned." She entered the room to see that her child (the future *Rav Chaim Pinto*) was alive and well. Today, he is the Chief Rabbi of Kiryat Malachi. Once again, we note: when one guards over the *Shabbos* – the *Shabbos* watches over him.