

But the seventh day is Shabbos to Hashem your G-d; you shall not do any work. (5:14)

Shabbos is much more than the catchword for the day of rest or the prohibition against laboring. *Shabbos* represents a covenant between *Klal Yisrael* and Hashem. It is a principle of our faith that Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day, proclaiming it holy. By not observing *Shabbos*, one impugns the belief in Hashem as Creator of the world. *Shabbos* calls to mind the exodus from Egypt, without which we would have continued as a slave people. As *Ibn Ezra* observed, "A slave never rests." Hashem liberated us from the slavery of Egypt and commanded us to rest (on *Shabbos*), so that (by nature of the contrast) we remember that we were once slaves.

We have no dearth of *Shabbos* stories. Throughout the millennia, our people have sacrificed in order to observe *Shabbos*. One point should be emphasized: They never viewed their devotion as a sacrifice. It was to teach them the Jewish way of life. It is for this reason that I quote two stories related by *Horav Shlomo Levenstein, Shlita*. We are living in a time when not only is the major segment of the Jewish population non-*Shabbos* observant, but those of us who observe *Shabbos* have almost begun to accept non-*Shabbos* observance as an accepted way of life. There used to be a time when great people fainted at the mere report of *chillul Shabbos*, desecration of *Shabbos*. Indeed, "desecration" has been replaced with "non-observance." *Chillul Shabbos* has sadly lost its anathema status, because many neither understand the gravity of *Shabbos*, nor realize what *shemiras Shabbos* used to mean, and, in most cases, still means to a Torah Jew.

The *Sefer Shalmei Chagiga*, authored by *Horav Yisrael Algazi*, relates the following episode which took place with *Horav Kalonimus*, a holy mystic, father-in-law of the *Maharashal*. The gentiles in Yerushalayim concocted a blood libel against the Holy City's Jewish inhabitants, claiming that they had murdered a gentile youth on *Shabbos*. We must understand that, as ludicrous as the libel sounds, the blood thirsty *goyim* of six centuries ago required very little to get them riled up against the Jews. It was their favorite pastime.

The people came to *Rav Kalonimus* and entreated him to avert what might become a Jewish massacre. Understanding that the issue involved *hatzolas nefashos*, saving Jewish lives, *Rav Kalonimus* resorted to proceeding in an atypical manner. He wrote down certain letters of Hashem's Holy Name and used them to resurrect the murdered gentile. The deceased arose from the "dead" and pointed out his murderer. He then returned to his "past tense." This action saved the Jewish community.

The punch line came afterwards. Although it was totally permissible to desecrate *Shabbos* to save Jewish life, *Rav Kalonimus* felt spiritually tainted by his action. He, therefore, left in his will that, for the first one hundred years after his death, stones should be thrown on his grave. This would atone for his "sin" of *chillul Shabbos*.

While this episode occurred more than six centuries ago, one should not mislead himself into thinking that devotion to *Shabbos* was something that was in vogue during the late middle-ages. The following episode, which took place during the European Holocaust, refutes this notion.

“Stealing” food from the kitchen in the Auschwitz death camp was an unpardonable sin. If a Jewish internee were to risk stealing a morsel of food, it was to save the life of someone who was dying of hunger. A young Jewish mother was accused of this “dastardly” act. Her young daughter was literally dying before her very eyes. She was prepared to risk life and limb to save her child.

The Nazi beasts did not see it this way. The woman was hauled before the camp commandant to have her case adjudicated and for a rendering of the verdict against her. The court case took place on *Shabbos* afternoon. After the prosecution had presented its case, the defendant was asked if she had anything to say in her own behalf. She remained silent, refusing to utter a word. As a result, the judge ruled that she should be severely punished.

Afterwards, she was asked why she had absolutely refused to vindicate herself, to speak in her own behalf. She replied that, upon noticing that the “court” stenographer was a Jew, she realized that, by speaking, she would be causing another Jew to desecrate *Shabbos*. She would rather remain silent, thereby incurring severe punishment, than cause another Jew to be *mechallel Shabbos*. *Halachically*, this was not demanded of the woman, since it was part of saving her life. Nonetheless, the lengths to which a Jew will go to observe Hashem’s *mitzvos* knows no bounds.