

The Bnei Yisrael were in the wilderness and they found a man gathering wood on the Shabbos day. (15:32)

The *Maharal m'Prague* (*Gur Aryeh*), notes that the *mekoshesh eitzim*, one who gathered wood on *Shabbos*, carried out his act of contempt during the second *Shabbos* of the Jews in the wilderness. Apparently, they observed the first *Shabbos*. *Chazal* teach (*Shabbos* 118b) that had they observed two *Shabbosos*, they would not have experienced the bitter exile. *Shabbos* is the great panacea which would have protected them. Why did the *mekoshesh* desecrate the second *Shabbos*? He acted for the sake of Heaven (or so he believed), in order that people would realize that *Shabbos* observance was serious business. When they would see the punishment meted out against someone who desecrates the *Shabbos*, they would think twice before acting against the Torah.

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, applies his captivating imagery to describe the ascent of the *mekoshesh eitzim* to Heaven with the delusionary thought in his mind that he (of all people) was deserving of a front seat in *Gan Eden*. After all, by desecrating *Shabbos*, he taught the entire nation a valuable lesson. As he was waiting for his special pass, the Angels in charge asked for a few moments, while they showed him some meaningful scenes from Jewish history – scenes that were, in effect, the result of his “selfless” act of desecrating *Shabbos* to teach the people a lesson.

They first showed him the *Churban Bais Hamikdash*, destruction of the First Temple, followed by the destruction of the Second Temple and the Jewish nation’s exile from the Holy Land. This was followed by the rivers of Jewish blood, results of the systematic murders, pogroms, inquisitions and holocaust that wreaked havoc on our people. Seeing this, the *mekoshesh* began to wonder, “Why are you showing this to me? I am here to collect my due for the wonderful act of teaching the Jews the significance of *Shabbos*.”

They looked at him and calmly responded, “We simply would like you to see some of the results of your wonderful selfless act of profaning the second *Shabbos* of the year. Had you not desecrated that *Shabbos*, there would have been no destruction of the Temples, no exile, no pogroms, no inquisition, no holocaust – just peace and serenity. If you thought that your idea was so compelling, why did you not speak it over with Moshe *Rabbeinu*? As the preeminent Torah sage, he would have guided your actions. You thought that you were smart. You now realize that such a statement could not be further from the truth!”

We must never forget that our minds and thought process are, for the most part, subjective. The mere feeling that we are acting *l'shem Shomayim* neither sets nor determines the criteria for *l'shem Shomayim*. For that decision we have *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah giants, who are steeped in Torah and its wisdom. They are the individuals who, based upon their *daas Torah*, should render such a decision.