

Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it. (20:8)

I think the primary essence of *Shabbos* is to be derived from the word *l'kadsho*, "to sanctify it." This does not in any way mean to belittle the importance of *zachor*, "remember," the *Shabbos*. Clearly, one who does not remember, who does not observe *Shabbos* according to *halachah*, can hardly sanctify it. The suggestion, however, is that *Shabbos* observance without focusing on its sanctity, by concentrating on the positive aspects of rest, and how this time should be spent spiritually elevating ourselves, undermines the essence of *Shabbos*. *Shabbos* is a day of elevation, of spiritual growth, which is achieved through the medium of rest. We have the opportunity to rest our bodies, but, more importantly, our minds.

Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl, was a Torah giant whose sage advice in all areas of concern to *Klal Yisrael* was sought after and followed. This was especially true concerning the area of *kiruv rechokim*, Jewish outreach to the unaffiliated. A seasoned *kiruv* professional who worked for *Peylim* reminisced about the numerous times that he met with this slight, unassuming *gadol*, a quiet Torah giant whose love for Torah and *Klal Yisrael* motivated him to give of his precious time toward enhancing the lofty work of Jewish outreach. He responded to the *halachic* queries of *baalei teshuvah* and advised them concerning their attempt to navigate the transition between a lack of Jewish practice to a committed life of Torah and *mitzvos*. He was sensitive to the fears and practical challenges confronting the penitent, and he guided the professionals about how to best reach these once alienated Jews.

"From where does one begin?" was one of the most pressing questions that occupied everyone's mind. To demand complete *mitzvah* observance without compromise would quite possibly sink the ship in port. The overwhelming responsibilities, obligations and lifestyle changes necessary to become wholly observant could, for the most part, be a game changer and should be done slowly. One takes tiny steps, and, every so often, he stops to rest. The goal may be a long way off, but in this way, he has the possibility of achieving his goal.

Rav Shteinman replied, "Three *mitzvos* and one *t'nai*, stipulation: *Tefillin*, *Tzitzis*, *Shabbos* and (the *t'nai*) *kashrus*, Jewish dietary laws." He explained that *tefillin* is a powerful *mitzvah* which can be fulfilled in just a few minutes; it places no heavy demands on one's time. *Tzitzis* is a *mitzvah* that one fulfills every minute that he wears the *tallis katan*. It makes no public demands on him. He can put it on under his shirt, and no one need be aware. Third is *Shabbos* observance. Here, *Rav Shteinman* qualified his words. It is not only about observance. If a hopeful *baal teshuvah* is given a list of "do nots," the negative overload will be too much. He must not think that Judaism is the religion of "no." He must explore the positive aspects of *Shabbos*, for which *shul* attendance is a prerequisite. Yes, encourage him to attend services, to listen and join in the singing and chanting of the tunes, to observe firsthand how a Jew *davens* to Hashem, and the meaning of talking to Hashem.

A *baal teshuva* needs to experience the beauty and sanctity of *Shabbos* in order to appreciate the

prohibitive commandments connected to observance. Only when he sees and experiences the majesty and sanctity of *Shabbos*, the *l'kadsho*, can he later go on to accept the *zachor* and become a full-fledged *Shabbos* observer. One can better concentrate on the *sur mei'ra*, turn from evil, after he has tasted the *asei tov*, do good.

The *mitzvah* itself will protect the individual who is sincere in his *mitzvah* observance. *Chazal* (*Pesachim* 8a) state, *Shluchei mitzvah einan nizakim*, "An emissary dispatched to do a *mitzvah* will not be harmed." When, and under which circumstances this applies, is not our present focus. Rather, the very idea that a *mitzvah* protects suggests that, when we perform a *mitzvah*, we connect with Hashem, Who sees to it that no negativity should surface as a result of the *mitzvah*. This serves as a preface to a story that *Rebbetzin Batsheva Kanievsky, a.h.* related, which incidentally pertains to *Shabbos*.

A young woman became a *baalas teshuvah*, returned to religious observance, despite having been raised totally assimilated. She had been estranged from Torah life and *mitzvah* observance. It was all foreign to her. Bit by bit, ever so slowly, she felt comfortable with observance, except for one thing. Having smoked cigarettes her entire adult life, she just found it nearly impossible to give up smoking on *Shabbos*. She made the attempt a number of times. Despite her determination to succeed, however, she always fell short. She even became ill as a result of abstaining from cigarettes.

The *rabbanim* that were involved in her return to observance turned to *Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zl*, wondering if he would render a *halachic* decision/dispensation concerning her problem. *Rav Elyashiv's* immediate response was, "Check her lineage, I suspect that she is not Jewish." The *rabbanim* were taken aback by this strange reply, but, when the *gadol ha'dor*, preeminent Torah giant of the generation, speaks, one listens. They investigated and, after a complete background check, it was discovered that, indeed, her mother was not Jewish. They immediately arranged for her conversion to Judaism, to which she readily agreed. All of a sudden, her addiction to smoking on *Shabbos* ceased. Obviously, everyone involved sought an explanation. *Rav Elyashiv* explained that *Chazal* teach that it is prohibited for a non-Jew to observe *Shabbos*. This woman was wholly sincere in her desire to serve Hashem. As a result, the Almighty created a situation whereby she would be unable to give up smoking, thus preventing her from transgressing His will.