

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

Two central themes characterize the observance of *Shabbos*. It is an expression of our belief that Hashem created the world in six days, which implies the existence of the Creator. We also observe *Shabbos* in remembrance of Hashem's kindness in liberating us from the bondage of Egypt. The Egyptians made labor on *Shabbos* mandatory. The *Midrash* teaches that the Egyptians forced the Jews to work on *Shabbos* and transgress all thirty-nine *melachos*, labors, that are prohibited on *Shabbos*. The *Arizal* teaches that the thirty-nine labors correspond to the thirty-nine curses which were the result of Adam's eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, Tree of Knowledge. (Adam received ten; Chavah received ten; the *nachash* received ten; and the earth received nine.) The *Be'er Mayim Chaim* teaches that, by resting on *Shabbos*, thereby refraining from transgressing the thirty-nine labors, we ameliorate those curses. By forcing the Jews to work on *Shabbos*, the Egyptians were seeking a means to prevent them from receiving the *kedushah*, sanctity, associated with *Shabbos*. When we refrain from transgressing the thirty-nine labors prohibited on *Shabbos*, we recall the Egyptian's evil decree to make our ancestors work on the holy day. Thus, we establish a *zeicher*, memorial, *I'yetzias Mitzrayim*.

In the *Echad mi yodea*; "Who knows one?" chant at the end of the *Haggadah*, we ask: *Shivah mi yodea*, "Who knows seven?" The answer is: The seven days of the week. The obvious question is: Are we the only ones who are aware that a week is comprised of seven days? This certainly is not a Jewish exclusive. "I know seven" implies that only I, the Jew, knows seven. *Kuzari* explains that the Jewish calendar months are calculated on the basis of the lunar cycle of 29 or 30 days, which makes the year 254 days. The secular months of 30 or 31 days yield to the solar year of 365 days. However, the fact that a week has seven days – no more, no less – has no basis in science or astronomy. The seven-day week is based on the idea that Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day – *Shabbos Kodesh*. The non-Jewish world, who refuses to accept the verity that Hashem created the world, does not know the reason that a week is comprised of seven days.

Furthermore, the number seven has profound significance in Torah, because it symbolizes *kedushah*. The number seven is used for: the seven weeks of counting the *Omer*; the seven years of *Shemittah* cycle; land returned to its owner after *Yovel*, jubilee/fiftieth year, comprised of seven cycles of *Shemittah*, *Eretz Yisrael* is blessed with seven fruits. This is in addition to the seven seas and the seven celestial Heavens.

We understand the importance of the number seven and its relationship to *kedushah*. It is no secret to those who oppose us that *Shabbos* is no ordinary day of rest, but rather, a day of spiritual elevation and reflection.

The *Bobover Rebbe, zl, Horav Bentzion Halberstam*, explained why the Germans write the number seven with a small stroke in the middle. This stems from the fact that the German people are descendants of Amalek, the arch-enemy of the Jews and Hashem. Amalek's goal is to blot out any

vestige of *kedushah*. They understand that the number seven has profound meaning to the Jewish People. Thus, his descendants draw a line through the number 7, eradicating the symbol of holiness.

I have always wondered why *Shabbos* observance is one of the first *mitzvos* which the various strains of secular Judaism target for archiving to a remote place in our history. Simply, to them *Shabbos* meant, “No.” They were prohibited from doing what they wanted. Going where you want and eating what you want are inconsistent with the imperatives of *Shabbos* and *kashrus*.

Now, with the above in mind, I think their greatest fear was dealing with – and falling under – the rubric of *kedushah*. It is not sufficient for us to be good, moral and ethical. We must also strive for *kedushah*. Hashem wants us to be *anshei kodesh*, a holy people, because He is holy.

When we address issues concerning *kedushah*, we have no barometer for measurement. *Kedushah* is spiritual, and the spiritual is infinite. Thus, we have no idea concerning the value of even the smallest amount of *kedushah*. Likewise, we have no clue what a small measure of *kedushah* can achieve. When one individual creates a change, which manifests itself in elevating *kedushah*, it is an enormous achievement – regardless of how limited the change.

The following story, related by Rav Goel Alkarif, demonstrates this idea. Sensitivity towards an infraction can vary from person to person. People have different values, experiences, and perspectives which influence their perception of a given misconduct. While diversity is, at times, beneficial, the Torah should determine our understanding and what is right and wrong in terms of *mitzvah* observance. The Torah should be the only barometer of sin. Having said this, I introduce the reader to a wonderful G-d-fearing couple from Bnei Brak. They both work in a *cheder*; he is a maintenance man, and she is a long-time preschool teacher. Their marriage of thirty-five years had been filled with harmony, respect and love. One thing has marred their otherwise happy marriage – they had no biological children. While thousands of children who entered the portals of the *cheder* had been positively influenced by their unique demeanor, they had no children of their own. Then suddenly, after thirty-five years of marriage, at the age of fifty-five, the wife gave birth to twins – a boy and a girl. Words cannot describe the joy that permeated the entire community. Everyone celebrated with them. Theirs was truly a community *simchah*.

When the proud parents were asked what they had done to earn such a Heavenly miracle, they responded with an incredible story. The husband began, “We live on *Rechov Chevron*, a street which is quite heavily traveled during the week. On *Shabbos*, however, fifteen to twenty cars use the street. It may not be a lot, but I figured if we could get the municipality to close the street for *Shabbos*, no cars would traverse, and the holy day would be enhanced. I was very distressed by the *chillul Shabbos* that was taking place right before our eyes, in a city that is the standard for Torah and *chassidus*.”

The council member with whom he met explained that, in order to close a street for *Shabbos*, it

was mandatory that all residents sign a consent form. “We decided to undertake the daunting challenge of going to every resident of the affected area, which included a number of four-story apartment buildings and ask the residents to sign. We understood that this task would involve a considerable amount of time, but, when one is childless, he unfortunately has a lot of available downtime. It took three years to sign everyone up. It involved much effort, since not every resident was predisposed to the idea. Some simply did not care. Others were loath to affix their name to any public document. Finally, we returned to the municipality with the requisite signatures. Alas, we discovered, to our chagrin, that a number of the early signatures were invalid. People had moved, and new people had moved in. We needed recent signatures. Had we not been driven by a burning desire to honor the *Shabbos*, we probably would have given up, but we were driven – and we returned to the task. We did it! The second time around was easier, and successful. The street was closed. Nine months later, we were blessed with a Divine miracle: the birth of our twins!”

*Rav Alkarif* sums up the story with an insightful comment: “Tel Aviv’s mayor is secular. He is bent on opening businesses on *Shabbos*. (The fact that Tel Aviv is a Jewish city in a Jewish land and hosts a number of large Orthodox communities is not his concern. He wants a cosmopolitan city that will compete with large urban metropolises of the world.) In Bnei Brak, a simple committed Jew lives whose heart is pained when he sees even the slightest vestige of *chillul Shabbos*. Bnei Brak is a large Torah city in which very few cars drive through on *Shabbos*. *Rehov Chevron* has perhaps fifteen to twenty cars on a *Shabbos*. Nonetheless, those few cars were enough to inspire one Jew to take a stand on behalf of *Shabbos*... One should never think, ‘What can I achieve? What difference can one person make?’ We must remember that every Jew is a *keili*, vessel, to increase *kavod Shomayim*. Every minor change – however minute – brings him closer to his Father in Heaven. Who is prepared to relinquish such an opportunity?”