

And they found a man gathering wood on the Shabbos day ... The man shall be put to death; the entire assembly shall pelt him with stones. (15: 32,35)

Someone who is, for the first time, being introduced to the institution of *Shabbos Kodesh* can find it to be overwhelming. No other prohibitive *mitzvah* in the Torah exists whereby what appears to be one simple, although forbidden, act will incur such stringent punishment as execution by stoning, which is the most strict of the four modes of *bais din* mandated executions. If one were to *chas v'shalom* burn a *Sefer Torah* with all of its sacred names; if one were to eat a non-kosher animal, an act which is *mitamtem es ha'lev*, stuffs/occludes the heart (one who consumes non-kosher food becomes non-receptive to spiritual growth), he becomes spiritually plugged up. Even one who murders a fellow Jew, although liable for the death penalty, will not receive *sekillah*, stoning. Yet, one who strikes a match or skims off the fat from milk is *mechalel*, desecrates, *Shabbos*, which is punishable by *sekillah*.

While the purpose of this question is not to, *chas v'shalom*, question Hashem, it is important to present some form of rationale so that one will better understand the stringency of *Shabbos kodesh*. *Horav Shimshon Pincus*, *zl*, draws a powerful analogy which reveals the uncompromising nature of *Shabbos* observance.

Imagine, while addressing the surgical needs of a man with an abscess on his leg, the surgeon cut a few centimeters more than he should have. It can be rectified with stitches and cosmetic creativity. Mistakes happen. If this were cardio-thoracic surgery, however, an error in a centimeter can spell a death sentence for the patient. It all depends on the surgical site. The heart, brain or any such organ which is critical for life demands surgical perfection with no room for error.

Shabbos is unlike any other *mitzvah*. It is a core *mitzvah* upon which the principles of Judaism are established. If one does not believe that Hashem rested on the seventh day of Creation, then his belief in Creation is flawed. *Shabbos* is the heart of Judaism, the source of blessing, the fountain of life for a Jew. To desecrate *Shabbos* is to sever one's relationship with the *Shechinah*.

The flipside is *shemiras Shabbos*. When we see the punishment meted out for desecrating *Shabbos*, we have an inkling of the extraordinary reward in store for he who observes *Shabbos*. One develops a greater, closer and more meaningful attachment to Hashem's *Shemiras Shabbos*, allowing him to experience *me'ein Olam Habba*, a semblance of the World-to-Come. Obviously, the blessings apply only under such circumstances that one observes *Shabbos* joyfully, looking forward to the moment that *Shabbos* begins, and dreading when it ends. *Shabbos* is here for us to commune with Hashem and infuse our own lives with His *kedushah*.

One *Shabbos*, *Horav Eliyahu Lopian*, *zl*, walked together with *Horav Moshe Aharon Stern*, *zl*, to Yeshivas Chevron. A number of cars passed them by. *Rav Elya* began to moan, "I have such pity

on these drivers. There is no one who could impress upon them the stringency of desecrating *Shabbos*. Let us return. I just cannot tolerate this.” Rav Moshe Aharon said, “But *Rebbe*, we are almost at the *yeshivah*. The closer we get in proximity, the *chillul Shabbos* will decrease.”

Rav Elya agreed, but he still emitted a loud moan. At that moment, a car stopped, and its driver looked up at Rav Elya and asked, “How do I get to *Rechov Yaffo*?” (The man was obviously clueless to what he was asking and whom he was asking for directions.) When Rav Elya heard this question, he broke out in bitter weeping, “What should I do?” he cried. “Give directions, so that a Jew will continue along in his *chillul Shabbos*, or ignore the question? How can I ignore a brother who asks me for help?” Rav Elya once again began to weep bitterly.

Seeing this, the driver stopped, shut his motor and exited the car, “*Rebbe!* Never did I sense rebuke that was sincere as I do now. My mother is *shomeres Shabbos*, observant, and, all *Shabbos*, she screams at me concerning my lack of observance, but I never saw her cry bitterly over my actions. I see, *Rebbe*, the sincerity, the love of *Shabbos* and the pain you have if a Jew desecrates it. I promise from here on in to begin to observe *Shabbos* as a Jew should!”