

**Good Shabbos Everyone.** Imagine a long table covered with a beautiful white tablecloth. On the table there are silver candlesticks with candles burning, and a crystal flask of deep red wine. Imagine that at the head of the table there are two braided loaves of bread. Imagine that the room is warm; it is a spiritual warmth. Imagine that the smell of chicken soup wafts in the air. Imagine that the children are smiling, the adults have a content and relaxed expression on their faces and everyone is wearing their finest clothing. Imagine that there are no worries, no bills to pay, no pagers, no ringing cell phones, no bosses, no blaring televisions; instead there is great food, wonderful song and inspiring words of Torah. Image peace. Imagine happiness. Imagine tranquility. Imagine a taste of the world to come. In short, Imagine Shabbos...

If you experience the beauty of Shabbos every week then you know... If you have yet to experience Shabbos, then your imagination will have to suffice. Everyone knows that reality is much better than the imagination.

Shabbos is the most important institution in the Jewish faith. The Sages go so far as to say that "Observing Shabbos is equal to fulfilling all the mitzvahs of the Torah." (Pesikta)

The importance of Shabbos is evidenced by the fact that Shabbos appears in the Ten Commandments, which is the seminal creed of the Jewish people. As we read in this week's parsha VaEschanan in the fourth commandment: "Safeguard the Shabbos day to make it holy..." (Devorim 5:12) Many Jews are willing to accept upon themselves the Ten Commandments. However, a Jew who does not keep Shabbos is only observing nine of the Ten Commandments. (Shabbos, Rav Aryeh Kaplan) The following inspirational story illustrates a group of Jews dedication to Shabbos under most difficult of circumstances.

Among the unlucky ones to be sent to Siberia during World War II were Tuvya Goldstein and 11 other bochurim from Kaminetz. The bochurim were forced to clear a forest on Shabbos. Although the Russian work supervisor left the Jews to do the work unattended, the supervisor actually climbed a nearby hill to observe secretly their work.

In order to minimize their violation of Shabbos, the bochurim performed melacha (forbidden Shabbos labor) in pairs and carried objects for less than four amos (cubits) at a time. As the Russian supervisor looked on incredulously from the nearby hill, two or three bochurim would pick up even the tiniest piece of wood and start walking. The Russian supervisor thought he would explode with anger as he watched two or three bochurim carrying a three-inch twig, walk three or four steps and then stop to rest and walk three or four steps and then rest again. On Motzoi Shabbos (Saturday night), Reb Tuvya and the others were put on trial for sabotaging the Russian war effort by failing to work properly. The likely penalty was death.

Reb Tuvya and the others feared for the worst. They decided to say viduy - confession before death. As the case against the Jews dragged on, six distinguished men from the Moscow Interior Central Committee suddenly walked into the room. One official asked to meet with the bochurim in a private room. Once he was alone with the bochurim, the Russian official began to speak. "Zets zach," said the Russian officer. The young Jewish men froze. Was this a ploy? How did the officer know Yiddish? "A guta voch!" For the first time in several hours Reb Tuvya and the others felt relaxed. The officer from Moscow continued reassuringly, "Ich bin a Yid." The Jewish inmates were in shock.

"Let me tell you about myself," said the Russian officer in Yiddish. "I am a Jew but I am also a Communist. A few years ago my mother died, but as she lay on her deathbed she called me to her bedside and said: I know you are a Communist but I want you to promise me that someday you will do something to help a religious Jew. That was her last and only request of me, and I promised my mother that someday I would fulfill her request. I believe in my heart that now is the time, because I see that a power beyond my control brought me here to you. We [members of the Interior Central Committee from Moscow], never come to these camps after dark. But tonight, as we were driving, our car broke down. We had no idea where we could stay overnight until we saw the lights of this auditorium. We walked over here, right into the middle of your trial." **Continued** →

The Russian Jewish officer proceeded to argue in the defense of Tuvya and the other bochurim. In the end, the Jewish officer managed to ensure that the Jewish workers would not be punished. On the contrary, the Jewish workers would be treated better than they had been treated before the incident. Reb Tuvya Goldstein later went on to become Rosh Yeshiva of yeshivas Emek Halacha in New York. Reb Tuvya became known as a famous posek, deciding many issues of hilchos Shabbos. (Around the Maggids Table, p.225-233 R.P.Krohn)

Hashem commands us not to do "work" on Shabbos. What does it mean not to work on Shabbos? Does it mean that we must not show up to our jobs, but that driving to the park is okay? We will learn this week that Hashem's idea of not working on Shabbos involves refraining from creative work. Just as Hashem created the world in six days and rested from creating on the Seventh day, so too do we rest on Shabbos by not exercising our creative powers.

The question remains: What kind of work is forbidden on Shabbos? Does everyone decide for themselves what work is? Or, does Hashem tell us what "work" on Shabbos is? The Torah calls for the death penalty for a Shabbos desecrator. It is unlikely that the Torah would call for such a stringent penalty without Hashem telling us what constitutes a violation. In short, how can there be a punishment without a definition of what is forbidden? In order to answer our question, we delve deeper into the wisdom of the Torah.

One of the basic tenets of our beliefs as Jews is that there are two Torahs: the Oral Torah and the Written Torah. When Moshe received the written Torah on Mt. Sinai, Hashem also gave Moshe an oral explanation of the mitzvahs, as well as an explanation of the methods the Sages use to analyze the written Torah. The design of tefillin, for example, comes from the Oral Torah. The written Torah does not openly describe how Tefillin should be made.

Without the Oral Torah, we really have no idea what the Torah means. For example, opening up a Torah scroll, we see that there are no vowels. Thus, how do we know that it is forbidden to eat Milk and Meat together? We look at the verse: "Do not cook a kid in its mother's milk." (Shemos - Exodus 23:18) The words for "milk" and "fat" are spelled the same – ches, lamed, beis. Since there are no vowels in the Torah, how do we know that the verse is talking about milk; maybe it is a mitzvah to eat cheeseburgers and a violation to eat a burger with fat?!? Only with the Oral Torah do we know how to read the Torah. Only with the Oral Torah can we be Jews. Now let us return to Shabbos.

The Mitzvah to keep Shabbos is repeated in the Torah portion Vayakhel. Just before Hashem commands Moshe to start building the Mishkan, Hashem repeats the commandment to keep Shabbos. (see Rashi on Shemos- Exodus 31:13) (R.A.Kaplan z.l, Sabbath p.130 A. Kaplan Anthology.) From the juxtaposition of these two mitzvahs (the Mishkan and Shabbos), the Sages learn that all of the labors which went into building the Mishkan are forbidden on Shabbos. (Mechilta, Shabbos 70a, ibid.)

The Mishkan was surely an important structure; it was to be Hashem's dwelling place on earth. However, Hashem Himself tells us that Shabbos is even more important than the Mishkan. Therefore the Sages derive that all of the labors which went into building the Mishkan are forbidden on Shabbos. Because Hashem rested on Shabbos from His creation of the universe, we too rest on Shabbos by refraining from CREATIVE work.

Under the most difficult conditions, the 12 young men in the story we read above, still sought to honor Shabbos by resting on the holy day. How much more so must we strive to keep Shabbos with all of its intricate guidelines. The extent to which we observe the laws of Shabbos, is the extent to which we will feel the happiness and spiritual pleasure of the holy day. Experience peace. Experience happiness. Experience tranquility. Experience a taste of paradise. Experience Shabbos... **Good Shabbos Everyone.**