

**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. Imagine that there are no worries, 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 paradise. 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 the solution to all the world's problems. As the Talmud teaches us: "If all the Children of Israel would observe one Shabbos properly, then Moshiach would come immediately." (The 39 Avoth Melacha of Shabbath, Rabbi Baruch Chait, citing Talmud Yerushalmi, Taanis 1:1)

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 Yisro in the fourth commandment: "You shall remember the Shabbos day to make it Holy. Six days you shall work and you shall do all of your labor. But the seventh day is Shabbos for Hashem your G-d, you shall not do any work..." (Shemos - Exodus 20:9) Many people are willing to accept upon themselves the Ten Commandments. However, one who does not keep Shabbos is only observing nine of the Ten Commandments.(Shabbos, Rav Aryeh Kaplan)

The Sages have told us in many places about the greatness of Shabbos. For example, "Whoever is careful with Shabbos observance will be forgiven for all of his sins, even idol worship." (Ibid, citing Shabbos 118b) And, "Respecting Shabbos is greater than fasting 1000 days." (Ibid., citing Tachuma, Bereishis 3) Also, "Whoever takes pleasure in the enjoyment of the Shabbos will be granted all his heart's desires." (Ibid., citing Shabbos 118b) And, "Observing Shabbos is equal to fulfilling all the mitzvahs of the Torah." (Ibid., citing Pesikta) And, "Proper observance of just one Shabbos is equal to having observed every Shabbos since the time of Creation." (Ibid., citing Mechilta, Ki-Sisa 31) The following inspirational story shows us the power of keeping Shabbos.

The distraught woman took an audible breath. "My name is Sarah Paller." And it's my brother. He's going to end up in jail! He's been arrested, and now the judge wants to make an example of him for the rest of the community." Her voice began to grow hysterical again. "He's going to put my brother in jail! For five years!"

"What's your brother's name?" Rabbi Gruskin cut in. "Joe. Joe Paller." "Joe Paller?" Rabbi Gruskin repeated. "I don't think I know him. Is he affiliated with a synagogue?"

The woman replied with the name of a local conservative synagogue. "So why are you calling me?" Rabbi Gruskin asked, puzzled.

"I've already spoken to his rabbi, along with another rabbi who knows my brother," the woman admitted. "And they've both gone to see the judge."

"And?" "The judge hasn't responded to them! He won't listen, he doesn't understand! I was hoping maybe you could do something." "But how do you expect me to make a difference? I'm a total stranger."

"Please, rabbi. Please help me." Rabbi Gruskin sighed. "All right, I'll try." "Thank you, rabbi. Thank you so much!" She gave Rabbi Gruskin the address of her brother's business and hung up. Rabbi Gruskin set out immediately.

A short while later he was speaking to the receptionist at the front desk. "I'm here to see Mr. Paller." The secretary picked up her phone and dialed an extension. "Mr. Paller? There's someone here to see you."

A few minutes later a man walked into the lobby from a back office. He looked at the secretary, who nodded toward Rabbi Gruskin. "Mr. Paller? I'm Rabbi Gruskin." "What can I do for you?" Joe Paller asked.

"Actually, I came to see if there was anything I could do for you." Joe Paller gave Rabbi Gruskin a strange look. "I'm not sure what you mean." "Your sister called me this morning and said that you were in some sort of trouble with the law. She's worried that you're about to go to jail."

Joe Paller's face darkened. His jaw clenched as he muttered something angrily under his breath. "Who does she think she is, getting mixed up in my business like that?" he burst out. "And who do you think you are?"

Rabbi Gruskin lifted his hands in a soothing gesture. "I've only come because your sister seems very concerned about you. You should feel fortunate that somebody cares enough to help you."

"My rabbi has already spoken to the judge, and nothing's changed," Joe said dismissively. "Why should you be any different? "You're probably right about that," Rabbi Gruskin admitted. "If I went by myself to see the judge, I'm sure it wouldn't accomplish anything." He paused for a moment. "But what if I had someone with me when I went to see the judge? What if I went with someone special? Maybe then I could help you."

"Someone special?" Joe said suspiciously. "You mean a lawyer?"

"That's not quite what I had in mind, Mr. Paller." Joe Paller stared blankly at Rabbi Gruskin for a moment. "So who're you talking about?"

"Shabbos," Rabbi Gruskin said emphatically. "If I went to the judge with the power of Shabbos, I know that would help. I want you to start keeping Shabbos."

"That's ridiculous," Joe snorted. "What does the Sabbath have to do with going to jail? I've got a business to run, Rabbi, and I'm not going to throw it all away just because you told me to. You're crazy, coming in here thinking you can just tell me what to do!"

"You know something, Mr. Paller?" Rabbi Gruskin said, shaking his head. "I don't really know you, but I can see that you're not a very smart man."

Before Rabbi Gruskin could get another word out, Joe Paller had practically jumped on him. "Now wait just a minute here! How do you know I'm not smart? Why did you say that?"

"Relax, Mr. Paller, and listen closely. If you get five years in prison, that would mean 365 days multiplied by 5, so it's just over 1800 days of prison time. Now, I know a bit about life in jail, because I was a chaplain at one of the federal prisons, and let me tell you—it's no picnic. You're only allowed a set amount of mail a week, visitors only at certain times on certain days, phone calls only when they choose, no liquor. You'll sit in a two-by-four cell day in and day out, and you'll only be allowed in the yard if the judge grants permission. That's plenty of time away from your business in very unpleasant surroundings.

"Now let's say your business will keep going for another thirty years or so. Shabbos comes around fifty times a year, so it's a total of 1500 Shabbos days in those years. Granted, you're restricted on Shabbos too, but it's a bit more pleasant than in prison. You're in your own, comfortable home. You can eat cholent, kugel, drink liquor, rest a little, learn a little, go out for walks, be with your family. And during the rest of the week, you can write as many letters and make as many phone calls as you wish. "So you look at the numbers and at the restrictions, Mr. Paller. And you tell me which one's a better deal. You would pick prison and no family over Shabbos and family, and you tell me that you're a smart man? I just don't see it," Rabbi Gruskin concluded.

Joe Feller was silent for a few minutes. He scratched his chin and looked up at the ceiling before finally meeting Rabbi Gruskin's gaze. "So what do you want me to do?" he asked.

"What I said before. Start observing Shabbos. Give it a try, and while you do, think about everything I just said to you. I think you'll see I'm right."

"I guess it wouldn't hurt to try. Okay, I'll do it," Joe said decisively. "Let's shake on it." He held out his hand, and Rabbi Gruskin shook it.

"Now that you've promised to keep Shabbos, I think it's time to see the judge," Rabbi Gruskin offered. Joe walked over to the secretary's desk, picked up the phone and dialed a number. Then he held the phone out to Rabbi Gruskin. "Here, you talk to him."

Rabbi Gruskin took the phone and a few minutes later was put through to the judge himself. "This is Judge Collins, how may I help you?" "Good morning, Judge Collins, this is Rabbi Gruskin."

"You're calling about the Paller case, aren't you," the judge interrupted. "I think I've heard from every rabbi in the city." "Your honor, if you've seen every rabbi, then why not get to know another one?" The judge laughed.

"I guess you're right. Why don't you come down to my office this Tuesday? Then we can talk in person." Rabbi Gruskin hung up the phone and turned to Joe Paller. "I'll meet you here on Tuesday morning. We'll be seeing the judge that afternoon."

Joe's sentencing was scheduled for Thursday, so the two were careful about keeping their appointment with the judge on Tuesday. "So, Rabbi, what is it that you want me to know? I should warn you beforehand that I am determined to make an example out of Mr. Paller," the judge said coolly. "There has to be a stop to this behavior."

Rabbi Gurskin was silent for a moment, not knowing what to say. Finally, he said, "Your honor, I am reminded just now of Joseph and his brothers—from the Bible." "In what way?" the judge asked with interest. "I'm thinking specifically of the episode where Benjamin was supposedly caught stealing the silver flask. The brothers were dumbfounded, and exclaimed, 'What can we say? This is the work of the Almighty.'" Rabbi Gruskin stopped. "To tell you the truth, your honor," he admitted, "I am at a loss as to what to say."

The judge nodded, looking thoughtful. "It's interesting that you mentioned that episode. I am a Sunday school teacher, as well as a judge, and this Sunday I'll be teaching my class this particular story. I'm interested in hearing the Jewish point of view. Tell me what the Talmudic sages have to say."

Rabbi Gruskin related the story of Joseph and his brothers to a fascinated judge and an interested Joe Paller. The discussion lasted over an hour. "Rabbi, I'm impressed," the judge said finally. "I've changed my mind. I will not sentence Mr. Paller to jail. I'll give him probation, I'll give him a hefty fine, but no jail. I promise, Rabbi." (Visions of Greatness, Volume VIII, R. Y. Weiss) **Good Shabbos Everyone.**