

Temporary Teshuva: Ariel Sharon's Shemirat Shabbat

- Yisroel Rutman.

Teshuva does not necessarily require an entire remake of the personality. Sometimes, one small step is a beginning. A story told by Rabbi Yisrael Rutman, about the Shabbat that was observed by Prime Minister Sharon. It is accompanied by a lesson taught by Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler about two levels of observance, two dimensions of Shabbat, which explains why there is a tradition that if Jews keep two Shabbatot they would be immediately redeemed. The story is found on the internet through www.e-geress.org.

TESHUVA - EVEN IF ONLY ONCE....
A DREAM COME TRUE

By Rabbi Yisrael Rutman

I had dreamt about it for years, and this week it finally happened.

I had dreamt for years of an incumbent prime minister of Israel declaring in a time of national crisis that it was time to do a mitzvah. This week it happened. Ariel Sharon observed Shabbat. To be sure, it was not quite the way I had imagined it. I had pictured the prime minister donning talit and tefilin in the middle of a wartime address to the nation, and calling upon the people to follow him in a full return to Jewish tradition, explaining that only Torah and Teshuvah could save us.

Sharon did not do anything nearly so dramatic. He has not declared his religious intentions, nor has he called upon anyone else to do so. But what did happen was nevertheless remarkable. The Prime Minister had gone to the hospital to visit the surviving children of the Schijveschuurder family, that had been decimated in the Sebarro bombing. When he asked Shevual Schijveschuurder if there was anything he could do for them, he replied that if the Prime Minister wished to do something in remembrance and merit of the neshamot (souls) of his murdered parents and siblings, he should observe the coming Shabbat. Sharon was taken aback by the request, but he promised to try.

According to local reports, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon kept his promise. He refrained from the usual round of official business and politics. He took no phone calls and did not travel. Was it a full-fledged, letter-perfect Shabbat observance? Of course not. Before one can observe Shabbat correctly, one has to make a serious study of it. The laws regarding cooking, cleaning, business and many other routine activities are not mastered overnight. But Mr. Sharon was true to his word, that he would try, meaning that he would observe the day as best he could.

When he returned for another hospital visit, Hanah Schijveschuurder, who was also injured in the bombing, asked Sharon how it went. "Beseder gamur (It was all right)," he replied. Her grandmother suggested a second Shabbat, but he declined. Why a second Shabbat? What would a second Shabbat accomplish that the first one did not, if there was no real commitment on his part, only a personal gesture?

There was, however, wisdom in the grandmother's suggestion. Aside from the simple fact that once a person experiences Shabbat observance, and sees for himself that the various prohibitions

are not nearly so fearsome as they are made to sound, he might be ready to continue and expand his observance.

But there is more to it than that. The Sages of the Talmud declare that "If Israel would observe Shabbat twice according to the law they would be immediately redeemed." Taken literally, it is hard to understand. Why should that bring about the messianic era?

Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler explains that the Sages' are actually referring to two dimensions of Shabbat. There is the superficial, physical observance of the mitzvah (commandment), and there is the depth observance, the inner thoughts and intentions of the person. Not answering the phone because you know you are not supposed to "work" on Shabbat is one thing; understanding how the slight effort of speaking on the phone could be considered work is another thing. And tuning into the feeling of tranquility and closeness to the Creator is yet another level. Someone who begins to observe Shabbat is still very much immersed in the materialism of the workaday world. Shabbat comes to him as an external structure of law, a spirituality imposed from the outside. In time, however, one may advance to a deeper experience, that of the second Shabbat. Ultimately, it becomes an inseparable part of the person. The awareness of G-d's presence in the world, as Creator and Master of the universe, is synonymous with ultimate redemption from exile, which is, by definition a state of alienation from G-d.

So, unlike my dream, it wasn't, after all, a prime minister calling upon us to do teshuvah---it was rather the reverse, Shevual Schijveschuurder asked Sharon to do teshuvah.

In addition, it was ten-year-old Hanah Schijveschuurder, who addressed the nation with the eloquence of an exalted faith. In an interview with Israel Television conducted from her hospital bed, she explained the whole painful dilemma in which the Jewish people today finds itself. As she told the nation: "G-d is doing all this from Heaven, so that we should behave a little bit better." Her response to tragedy is an example for all of us. Without anger or bitterness, she accepts the most painful judgment one can possibly imagine as a moral lesson from above. Perhaps Ariel Sharon has done his part, at least for the moment. But what about the rest of us? Do we have one Shabbat? And if we do, what about the second Shabbat?

(Submitted by Nisson Shulman