



Observing the Shabbos and Saving Lives
Parshas Yisro

A century ago, traveling to Russia from Israel was a weeklong voyage aboard a ship. My grandfather, Rabbi Shneur Zalman Grossman, made the trip to visit Rabbi Yisroel the Stoliner Rebbe.

My grandfather spent most of the voyage studying Torah, as if he were in a yeshiva in Jerusalem.

During the voyage, a short time before Shabbos commenced, my father climbed to the deck to begin his Shabbos routine.

He would literally observe the Shabbos by staying awake the entire 25 hours. He would teach us that keeping the Shabbos meant actually observing it.

During this Shabbos on the boat he did the same. He climbed to the deck to use the moon as a source of light. He prayed for a while and then sat down for his Shabbos meal.

A man dressed handsomely sat further away from grandfather, not taking his eyes off him. My father continued with his routine, and as Shabbos concluded, the man approached him.

It turns out it was the famous Baron Rothschild. He enquired about grandfather's destination. "And where is your family?" the Baron asked. "At home, waiting for me," Reb Shneur replied.

"I have been watching you the entire Shabbos, and I like you," Rothschild said. "Is there any way I can help? Do you need any kind of support?" he offered. Grandfather shared with him the plight of the communities in the Galilee.

A day before departing, my grandfather visited his brother, Rabbi Shlomo Levi Grossman, who was one of the leaders of the community of pioneers in the Galilee. He told my grandfather about the cholera plague which claimed many victims, including his own daughter. He asked that grandfather have the Rebbe pray for them.

My grandfather told the Baron: "perhaps we were destined to meet here." And he then asked for help in eradicating the plague. The two departed, and my grandfather continued his journey to visit his rebbe.

In the past weeks we have read about the Israelites' exodus from Egypt and their receiving of one of the first commandments – the Shabbos, given at Marah.

"There He gave them a statute and an ordinance, and there He tested them."¹

Our Sages explain that at Marah, Moshe gave them some sections of the Torah so that they would busy themselves with them, namely they were given the laws governing the Sabbath, the red cow, and laws of jurisprudence.

In our weekly parsha we read about the receiving of the Ten Commandments.

"Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it. Six days may you work and perform all your labor, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord, your G-d."²

If the Shabbos was commanded at Marah, what need was there to command it again in the Ten Commandments?

Furthermore, we know that one commandment talks about remembering the Shabbos, while the other talks about observing the Shabbos. Both commandments were given simultaneously, in a way we cannot fathom. What does this mean?

Our Sages explained that the remembrance is a positive commandment, while the observance is a form of negative commandment, telling us to refrain from labor.

The holy books teach us that he who observes the Shabbos is remembered in the Heavens in a positive manner.

Shabbos was commanded in Marah, but the reward for the commandment is taught later on. He who is commanded to observe the Shabbos and does so, will be remembered by G-d.

Therefore, we received the second commandment on the Shabbos in the Ten Commandments, to teach us that he who observes the Shabbos is himself observed and kept safe by G-d.

My grandfather spent two years at the Stoliner Rebbe. One day he received a letter, it was from his brother, Shlomo, telling him the good news that the Cholera plague in the Galilee had died down. He shared, that one day trucks loaded with medications and medical equipment arrived in the area. Later on, doctors came and established a clinic. He then added a "PS": "some say that one of the Rothschilds is behind the operation."

In the merit of my grandfather's public display of respect for the Shabbos, the Jews in northern Israel were redeemed.

¹ Shmot 15: 25.

² Shmot 20:8-10.