

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

by Rabbi Dovid Green

"And the Children of Israel shall keep the Shabbos - to make it a day of rest for (all) of their generations as an eternal covenant. Between Me and the Children of Israel it is a sign forever that G-d made the heaven and the earth in six days, and on the seventh day He ceased working and rested." (Exodus 31:16-17)

Shabbos is called a sign between G-d and us. What is the function of a sign? The Chofetz Chaim (d. 1933) provides us with an analogy which illustrates the answer to this question.

A man wishes to open a business. He finds a good location, and prominently hangs a sign for all to see. As long as the sign is hanging we can assume that the man is still in business. Even if the man would need to leave town for some time, and his business is closed for the duration, as long as the sign is hanging, we can assume he is still in business.

If we notice that the sign has been removed, then we can assume that the business is defunct, assuming that he didn't move his business somewhere else in which case the sign will be hanging there.

This is what the Torah is telling us about Shabbos and G-d's covenant with us. Shabbos is a sign. As long as the sign is prominent - even if the store is closed for a little while, the connection with G-d is still strong. That means to say that even if a Jew sins - he closes his store - if the sign is still hanging - Shabbos is still on his schedule - it is still clear that his connection is not severed. However, when the sign comes down it appears that the business is closed.

Shabbos is our way of demonstrating our belief in G-d having created the world. Through observance of Shabbos we actively give testimony that we are believers. We believe in the creation, and we believe that just as G-d can create the world, He can give us the livelihood which we need even if we don't engage in pursuing it on Shabbos. It is a positive statement manifest in our actions. Our actions say "G-d is the boss. I'm not in charge here."

To the uninitiated, Shabbos seems like a time of great restriction. You can't do anything! To those who observe Shabbos, though, it is very different. Ideally, Shabbos is quality family time, when meals are eaten together at a nicely set table, and we sing songs of Shabbos. We speak about what the children learned regarding the Parsha of the week, we read dvartorah :), and share time together. The restrictions create an environment, a sort of island, when I don't have to drive car pool, and I don't have to answer the phone, and I don't have to deal with monetary matters, or work. It's a time

when I can sit back and think about what I'm here for in this world. It is the true essence of our existence.

Someone once said that more than the Jews have kept Shabbos, Shabbos has kept the Jews. It is our time of recharging and refocusing. It's when we remind ourselves that when we go back out into the world after Shabbos, that we are spiritual beings with a spiritual purpose. We carry that into our workday and we are elevated by that knowledge. It is a great ennobling force. Shabbos is the source which the other days derive blessing from. Let's schedule Shabbos on our calendars, and hang up our signs prominently!

Good Shabbos!

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