

# SHABBOS: A TIME TO BE...

by Rabbi Label Lam

*You shall observe the Shabbos, for it is holy to you; its desecrators shall be put to death, for whoever does work on it, that soul shall be cut off from amongst its people. For six days work may be done and the seventh is a day of complete rest, it is sacred to HASHEM; whoever does work on Shabbos shall be put to death. (Shemos 31:12-15)*

Wow! Shabbos is sure serious business. There are not less than thirty-nine categories that fall under the heading of "creative work" that are forbidden on Shabbos. One might think it is a paralyzing proposition to have to keep the countless details of the day but it is actually time of sublime pleasure. Why so many prohibitions? What's the big pleasure?

I remember being impressed by two cartoon video shorts I showed to my Hebrew Day School class years ago. The first depicted a man with a calculator for a head on his way to work. As the cool jazz music played and he passed through the city streets everyone he met had for a head whatever they did for a living. A shoe-maker had a hammer for a head. A bus passed by and a bunch of camera heads popped out. They were tourists. The fellow selling flowers in the lobby of the building had a bouquet for a head and his secretary a pencil rack. At work he is seen giving dictation to his secretary while the numbers on his calculator-face flash and then something indicating the passage of time signals his declaration, "It's time to go home for "Shabbos". Magically, his face is transformed into a human face and she gains human features as well. Each person he greets, wishing "Have a nice weekend" or "Good Shabbos" is restored with a human face.

The second clip shows a man squelching the obnoxious ring of his alarm clock. He toasts bread, percolates coffee and heads out to his car only to find that it won't start. Entering the house he is confronted by a surrealistic nightmare while the avant-garde jazz keeps beat in the background. The instruments, objects, and utensils in his house begin to loom larger and larger reciting, "clean me", "polish me", "fix me" in an ever more deafening chorus of demands. As they grow he is shrinking into utter insignificance. Suddenly he shouts with authority, "Quiet! I'm in charge here!" They then revert to normal proportion and he is seen reading peacefully as Shabbos candles shine brightly in the background.

What are these cartoon shorts so cleverly portraying? When we meet someone new and ask, "Who are you?" Chances are we will hear a reading back of a resume of career choices. "I'm a lawyer or a doctor etc." The question is, "Who are you?" Sometimes we are flooded with a list of recent purchases large and small as if an identity can be picked up at the mall. I have a dog or a new car

etc. This only what we have, not who we are.

I once heard Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, a prominent psychiatrist, state a psychological principle I think we can agree makes loads of sense. "Nobody likes to be locked into a "no exit" situation with someone they don't like!" This may help explain in part the anxiety we feel while taking seats on a plane. Rabbi Twerski continues, "That syndrome is amplified and intensified when the one we fear to be with is our self!"

The Torah takes the hammer out of our hands, removing the temptation to escape even into productive labor that might serve to distract us from our bigger mission in life. On Shabbos we are meant to gage how "what we do" and "what we have" impacts "who we are" and to learn to relate to others similarly. As we get better at preparing for that meeting the sudden silence is not so jolting and is in fact extraordinarily delightful. If prepared for correctly and observed with due diligence, we begin to long for Shabbos: a time to be... Text Copyright &copy 2005 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.