

DAY OF REST, DAY OF REFLECTION

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Parshios Vayakhel & Pekudei

Day of Rest, Day of Reflection

By Rabbi Elly Broch

"On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest to G-d" (Shemos/Exodus 35:2).

The Talmud (Tractate Shabbos 108) declares that through Sabbath observance even one who worships idols is forgiven. Why is Sabbath observance, as expressed primarily through refraining from creative acts, so fundamental?

Rabbi Avigdor Miller (1) explains that abstaining from creative acts on the Sabbath has multiple purposes. We refrain from these deeds to commemorate and emulate G-d's completion of the creation of the world from nothing on the Sabbath; Sabbath celebration testifies to this truth to the world. We rest and enjoy the Sabbath to celebrate all the kindness of the Creator that bestowed the joys of the creation upon us; we use the leisure time we have to contemplate the Torah, including the marvels of creation and the greatness of the Creator. Thus, refraining from creative acts gives us the opportunity to grow in gratitude and awareness of G-d and to share this with our similarly-reflecting families and communities. We also refrain from work to demonstrate our freedom that we gained when G-d took us out of the land of Egypt and made us his people. Israel was taken forth from Egypt, where they served Pharaoh, to be free to choose to serve G-d alone, and the primary service is proclamation that G-d is the Creator of the universe. The choice to abstain from creative acts thereby reminds us to have gratitude to the Creator who took us out of Egypt and freed us from slavery.

Rabbi Miller suggests that the six days of toil followed by the Sabbath are symbolic of our lives. This world is a preparation for the exclusively spiritual World to Come. We exert ourselves in this world to follow the dictates of our Creator, the mitzvos, to refine our character and allow us to forge and enhance our relationship with the Creator and, in turn, our happiness in the World to Come. We work

and attempt to achieve as much as possible during our lives, knowing that once in the next world we are not able to strengthen our connection and increase our reward. So, too, we work six days and attempt to achieve all that we can in this limited time, knowing that once the Sabbath comes, creative achievement ceases. Thus, elimination of creative acts on the Sabbath displays our awareness that only in this world do we have the ability to secure success and happiness in the world to come through exertion in performing the will of the Creator in this world.

Dayan Dr. Isidor Grunfeld (2) offers another perspective. As human beings, we have been endowed with numerous talents and abilities that we use to make an impact on the world. Although we do not have the ability to create something from nothing, we are, however, extremely successful at utilizing our talents and the resources available to further our ends. We do possess finite abilities to create and control within our environment. Thus, we are partners with G-d in our responsibility to manage and improve the world. This, however, has the propensity to engender arrogance: since we are so successful at what we do we are liable to make the mistake that we are the real creators and we exert real control over the world. The Sabbath comes as a reminder that only G-d truly creates and exerts full control over everything. To contrast, we refrain from creative acts to acknowledge our subservience to G-d, the actual Master over creation. By not manipulating or interfering with nature on the Sabbath we demonstrate that we never really possessed the genuine power to manipulate and control, only G-d does.

Part of the function - and beauty - of mitzvos is that by guiding our actions, they ingrain within us an appreciation and connection to the fundamentals of our faith. Sabbath observance is so essential because it displays our loyalty to the knowledge that G-d created the world, showers us with kindness and took us out of Egypt. More so, it states our belief in the supremacy of the next world where reward and punishment is administered, and it represents our recognition that although we are enabled to make an impact on the world, only G-d truly creates and controls.

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) 1908-2001; a prolific author and popular speaker who specialized in mussar (introspective Jewish self-improvement) and Jewish history, Rabbi Miller commanded a worldwide following through his books and tapes: of the tens of thousands of Torah lectures he delivered, more than 2,000 were preserved on cassettes

(2) Judge on the London Beis Din (Rabbinical Court), author of many books on fundamentals of Judaism (The Sabbath, The Jewish Dietary Laws and The Jewish Laws of Inheritance), and student and translator of the works of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

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