

SOMETHING FROM NOTHING

by Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig

When commanding us to observe the Shabbos (Sabbath), the Torah says, "On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for G-d; whoever does work on it shall be put to death." (Shemos/Exodus 35:2) Just as G-d created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, similarly we emulate Him by "creating" for six days and resting on the seventh. The Torah's "work" is not an issue of effort, exertion, or difficulty. The Talmud explains to us (Shabbos 70a) that the work the Torah prohibits are the 39 categories of creative labor utilized in building the Mishkan (Tabernacle). Why did G-d tell us specifically to refrain from the activities of building the Mishkan in order to emulate him?

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander (1) expounds that when G-d created the universe He created something from nothing. There had previously been no physical properties, but with creation G-d generated them. In contrast, when we create physical edifices we are creating something from something. We are merely manipulating the preexisting physical properties to generate a new functionality. But mankind, in its own way, is also capable of creating something from nothing. When the Jews built the Mishkan, they used physical devices and created a spiritual home for the Divine. The process of building the Mishkan is the paradigm of how we can use the physical world to foster spiritual growth.

We say in our Shabbos prayers that the Shabbos is the purpose of creation. On Shabbos we cease from our creative activities and focus on the spiritual goals behind them, just like G-d ceased His mundane creating and focused on the purpose behind it all. Shabbos, therefore, is a time to focus on the creative activities we normally perform throughout the week, and to think about the real reasons for doing them. In this way the Shabbos can affect all of our physical activities throughout the week, and turn them into spiritual ones.

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) Mashgiach/Spiritual Mentor of Ponovezh Yeshiva in B'nai Brak, close disciple of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler

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