

SHABBOS - BEING PREPARED

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

And the children of Israel shall keep the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos for their generations - an eternal covenant. Between Me and the Children of Israel, it is a sign forever, that in six days Hashem created heaven and earth; and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed. [Shemos/Exodus 31:16-17]

On Shabbos we recite the blessing, "Baruch ata Hashem, mekadeish ha- Shabbos - Blessed are you Hashem, Who sanctifies the Shabbos." On Yomim Tovim we say, "Mekadeish Yisrael ve-ha'zemanim - Who sanctifies Israel and the holy days." Why does the blessing of Shabbos contain no reference to the sanctity of Israel?

The answer is simple: Since the world's inception - since the very first week of creation - Shabbos has occurred every seven days. Even were no one in the entire world to keep or even know of Shabbos' sanctity, it would still be holy. Shabbos requires no declaration and no communal acceptance in order to acquire its kedushah - its holiness.

This is not the case with regard to Yom Tov. Before we were given the Torah and taught about the Yomim Tovim, there was no Yom Tov. Yom Tov receives its kedushah through the Sanhedrin, the court of Jewish law that is responsible for establishing the calendar and determining which day and month it is, and consequently when Yom Tov will occur. If they are mistaken in their calculations, and declare the "wrong" day Yom Tov, that day is still holy (and the "right" day isn't!), for it is B'nei Yisrael that establish Yom Tov and determine its sanctity. Thus when we refer to the holiness of Shabbos, we make no mention of Israel's sanctity, for they play no role in giving it its kedushah - they just go with the flow, so to speak.

In light of this distinction, we must ask why here we are referred to not only as "keeping" Shabbos but as "making" it too, when in fact we play no role in making Shabbos?

The Gemara (Shabbos 118b) says, "Were Israel to [fully] keep just two Sabbaths - they would be redeemed immediately!" Isn't one Shabbos enough? Why specifically two? This is especially difficult since the same Gemara also refers to "one Shabbos" being enough!

There is a Midrash P'liah - a Mystery Medrash: "The Shechinah (Holy Presence) has never left Israel - even during the weekday Shabbos! (see Midrash Ha-ne'elam parshas Korach)" What is the idea of the "weekday Shabbos" which also is graced by the Shechina's presence?

It is true, says the Zicron Menachem, that there is a Shabbos which the Torah establishes; this Shabbos is immutable. But there is also a Shabbos that only we can make.

"How do we know," asks the Gemara (Yoma 81b), "that there is a mitzvah to add on part of the mundane [the weekday] to the holy [Shabbos]? For the Torah refers to it [Shabbos] as Shabbatchem - your Shabbos - from where we see it is a mitzvah to add on to Shabbos from your own time." Whereas Shabbos proper has an official commencement, Tosefes Shabbos - that which we add on by accepting Shabbos before its official time - depends totally on us. Even a minute (or less) is enough to satisfy one's obligation to add on; and if a person wishes to add more chol (mundane) to kodesh he may do so, thus increasing the length of his Shabbos.

This is not as simple as it might appear. Once a person has accepted Tosefes Shabbos by declaring verbally or mentally that he now accepts Shabbos and will refrain from work, he is halachically forbidden from performing any melacha no matter how important (matters of life-and-death of course excluded as on Shabbos proper)! By getting ready early and greeting Shabbos before it comes, one becomes a partner with Hashem in making Shabbos, giving Shabbos an additional sanctity which only he can do.

This is the idea, he says, of the "weekday Shabbos." Just as the Shechinah graces the "Torah's Shabbos" with Its presence, so too the weekday Shabbos a Jew "makes" - by going to mikvah early, getting himself ready, going to shul and greeting Shabbos before it comes - is graced by the same kedushah and sanctity. These are the "two" Shabbos's which are really one. To be redeemed, it seems, it's not enough to just keep Shabbos with all its halachos. We have to demonstrate our anxiousness and love of Shabbos by adding on to the holy from the mundane, and it is in this merit that we will be redeemed.

The word ve-shomru - "and the Jews kept Shabbos" - also means to wait and anticipate. When we wait for and anticipate Shabbos by getting things started before the siren sounds, we "make the Shabbos an eternal covenant" - eternal referring to the time of the final redemption, for by being careful to keep this "second" Shabbos, we will be redeemed. This explains how it is that we recite the passage of ve-shomru before the Friday night shemona-esrai, in seeming contravention of the halacha that shemona-esrai must immediately follow the mention of redemption (Ga'al Yisrael - see Berachos 4b). In light of this, however, the verses of ve-shomru refer specifically to the Shabbos we make by adding on from the mundane to the holy, through which we will merit redemption. Thus, its recitation does not create a separation but rather a continuum between ge'ulah (redemption) and tefilah (prayer).

How honourable it would be if we truly treated Shabbos like the chosson who takes three steps forward to greet his kallah (Shabbos is referred to as our kallah); not waiting for her to come to him. Unfortunately, in the high-octane society in which we live - more so in North America than anywhere else in the world - it is often the Shabbos that does the greeting as we hysterically run around

putting the finishing touches on our weekdays. How different would the "taste of Shabbos" be if we were able to spend a half-hour or an hour before minchah going over the sidrah, learning some Gemara, or reciting Shir Ha-shirim - The Song of Songs, which has a special importance on Erev Shabbos? How much more relaxed and enjoyable would our Friday night prayers and meals be if we took the time to have a small rest before Shabbos? Of course it's not easy, and there's always one more thing to do, but so much of it depends not only on how much there is left to do but on our attitude - at what point in the day do we finally drop everything and succumb to Shabbos sanctity.

Summer and winter, we somehow manage to make Shabbos no matter when it starts. Greeting Shabbos early by adding on a bit of weekday depends to a large extent on us adjusting our psychological clocks to the concept that Shabbos doesn't begin at licht tzinden.

Have a good Shabbos.

This week's publication was sponsored by R'Zalman Deutsch, and by R' Shalom D'ancona, in honour of the Yoma De'Hilula of the holy Rebbe R' Elimelech of Lizensk. May his merit protect us. Text Copyright

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