

# A SHABBOS GATHERING

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

## FRIDAY NIGHT:

*And Moshe assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them: "These are the things that G-d commanded, to do them: For six days work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you..." (Shemos 35:1-2)*

Since this year is a Jewish leap year, this week's parshah gets a Shabbos to itself, as will Pekudei next week, b'ezras Hashem. This means there is more "space" to speak about the matter of Shabbos, about which the parshah begins.

As Rashi points out, this message was delivered to the Jewish People on the day after the first Yom Kippur, after Moshe finally received atonement for their "involvement" with the episode of the golden calf. Next, Rashi says:

FOR SIX DAYS: [Moshe] first told them the prohibition of the Shabbos before the mitzvah of the construction of the Mishkan, to teach that [the work of the Mishkan] does not override the Shabbos.

Probably one of the reasons why Rashi says this comes as a drash to teach us that Shabbos is of greater priority than the building of the Mishkan, is because, logically, the order should be reversed. After all, the construction of the Mishkan, as tradition teaches, was the "antidote" for the spiritual illness that resulted in the construction of the calf.

Furthermore, we are told that a main reason why Parashas Mishpatim begins with laws of ownership of slaves is because slavery was still fresh in the minds of the Jewish People at the time. This way, the newly freed Jewish nation would be able to better appreciate the need to treat their own slaves with the respect and dignity that they had been denied.

If so, then beginning with the mitzvah to build the Mishkan just after returning from G-d with atonement for the golden calf would have hammered home the need to channel spiritual energies in a "kosher" way. They had already learned about Shabbos a couple of times; review of these halachos could have waited an additional moment or two. Thus, Rashi elucidates as he does.

Even still, could not Moshe have simply told them after learning about the mitzvah to build a Mishkan, "But you can't build it on Shabbos. Construction of the Mishkan, as important as it is, does not supercede the need to protect the sanctity of Shabbos itself."? This way, Moshe could have struck the "anvil while hot" (i.e., teach them Hilchos Mishkan first while the golden calf was freshest in

their minds), and also guarantee that they didn't break Shabbos to build the Mishkan.

Perhaps, therefore, there is more to discuss here. In fact, perhaps, as much as the Mishkan was the "medicine before the illness," Shabbos was, is, even more so. In fact, if we go back one parshah to Ki Sisa, we will find that, sandwiched between the instructions for the Mishkan and the story of the golden calf, is Shabbos, once again.

And perhaps, following this line of thinking will yield new insights into the underpinnings of both Shabbos and what led the irreversible sin of the golden calf, for which we are still paying to this very day.

## **SHABBOS DAY:**

*...A day of complete rest for G-d...* (Shemos 35:1-2)

At first thought, one might ask, "What does the golden calf have to do with Shabbos?" However, such questions are easily deferred in light of the following remarkable statement by the Talmud:

Anyone who keeps Shabbos according to its laws will be forgiven even of idol worship like that of the time of Enosh. (Shabbos 118b)

This is pretty amazing, considering that the generation of Enosh was wiped away with a Flood.

Is this just a general statement, or is there a direct connection between the keeping of Shabbos and the abandonment of idol worship. To answer that question, we need to understand what it means to "keep" Shabbos, beyond just the technical aspects of Shabbos halachah.

As we know, the laws of Shabbos are many and quite complex. When it comes to Hilchos Shabbos, it is quite easy to lose the forest for the trees. However, the following posuk provides an important piece of information for regaining the forest once again:

The Children of Israel shall observe the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos an eternal covenant for their generations. Between Me and the Children of Israel it is a sign forever that in a six-day period G-d made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He relaxed and He rested (vayinafash). (Shemos 31:16-17)

As all the commentators point out, G-d never tires so He certainly does not need to rest. What is interesting to note is the word the Torah uses to describe G-d's rest: vayinafash. Rashi too finds this word worth commenting on:

AND HE RESTED: Any use of *nofesh*, "resting," is related to the word *nefesh*, "spirit," for [rest] restores one's spirit and breath through one's relaxation from the burden of labor. (Rashi)

True, but the term "Nefesh" refers to a particular spirit, in fact the fifth of the five levels of soul - Yechidah, Chiyah, Neshamah, Ruach, and Nefesh - within a Jew. Thus, Shabbos, it seems, is about

giving the Nefesh specifically a rest, once a week. And, somehow, in doing so, it becomes a sign of the special and holy relationship between G-d and the Jewish people, the opposite of which results in golden calves.

Why the Nefesh specifically? Because, of all the five levels of soul, it is the only one that interacts with the body; it is the only one that actually participates in an action. That is why when the Torah mentions the punishment of "kores," the cutting off of the soul, it refers to the person being punished as "the Nefesh."

And, what is it that the body, with the life force of the Nefesh try to accomplish? To control the environment in which it lives, to make it as comfortable as possible. It is the natural tendency of the body to try and manipulate the world around it to create a sense of self-reliance and security.

That is what we humans do six days of the week, and as long as our actions remain in the realm of what is permissible by Torah, G-d does not mind. On the contrary, He even encourages to take responsibility for our own lives during this period.

This way, when we hold back on the seventh day, it becomes even clearer that we are His servants, bound to him by a covenant that is represented by the sign of Shabbos. For the Nefesh to rest means the body loses its ability to control the world around it, and thus the Nefesh is able to join its four counterparts in oneness with G-d.

### **SEUDOS SHILSHIS:**

*The people saw that Moshe delayed in descending the mountain, and the people gathered around Aharon and said to him, "Rise up, make for us gods who will go before us..." (Shemos 32:1)*

As the Torah reveals, the creation of the golden calf did not come out of nowhere. It was, instead, the Erev Rav's (ha-umm) response to what seemed like Moshe's failure to return and lead the nation. They perceived his lateness as a sign that he was not returning, and they sought to replace him the best way they knew how.

It is interesting to note that the word the Torah uses for "delayed" is the word, "bosheish," which can be read, "b'shaishis," "at the sixth." Thus, Rashi comments and explains:

**THAT MOSHE DELAYED:** Because when Moshe went up the mountain, he said to them, "At the end of 40 days, I will come within SIX hours." They thought that the day he ascended was part of the count, but he had told them full days. (Rashi)

However, maybe the word is also an allusion to the six working days of the week that were just spoken about regarding Shabbos. In other words, the golden calf was to embody the concept of six as an ideology, the concept of man exercising his will over creation, to manipulate it and make it his own to do his bidding.

Thus, from this point of view, the golden calf was the antithesis of Shabbos. For, whereas Shabbos

came to reflect man's inherent subservience to G-d and therefore his vulnerability within the physical world, the golden calf celebrated man's ability to control the world and set himself up as its god.

Thus, even more than the Mishkan itself, Shabbos represents the true tikun for the golden calf, and its sister ideologies. Anyone who keeps the Shabbos as it is TRULY meant to be kept CANNOT commit idol worship, and if he once did, even as the generation of Enosh did, he must have completely foresaken such tendencies, and become worthy of forgiveness.

Having said this, we can now understand other amazing statements the Talmud makes regarding of Shabbos. Having learned these, we should be able to heighten the experience of Shabbos on a weekly basis.

### **MELAVE MALKAH:**

*Thus the heaven and earth were finished (vayechulu), and all their hosts. By the seventh day G-d completed His work which He had done . . .* (Bereishis 2:1-2)

There are many references to Shabbos throughout the Torah, but this one is the first. Thus, it is the centerpiece of the Friday night Kiddush, first in the Ma'ariv Shemonah Esrai and after that, in the actual Kiddush over wine before the meal.

However, its importance is driven home by the following:

Rava said, and some say Rebi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Even an individual who prays Friday night should say "Vayechulu," as Rav Hamnuna has said: All who pray Friday night and say "Vayechulu," is considered to have become a partner with The Holy One, Blessed is He, in creation . . . (Shabbos 119b)

Remarkable. It seems so simple. Just say a few words, with intention of course, and you become a partner with The Holy One, Blessed is He, in the most important creation of all time. It takes much more time and effort to make partner in the average law firm.

However, now we can appreciate why this is so. The word "vayechulu" means "and He completed," that is, the work of the six days came to an end with Shabbos. Anyone who buys into this concept wholeheartedly is doing the exact same thing as G-d did then.

But not just that. Every human being is another part of creation in need of completion. The manipulation of the physical that we perform all week long is really for the sake of developing ourselves, and when we continue that process via the physical world into Shabbos, we are attesting to our lack of completion on Shabbos.

On the other hand, when that same person says, "It's just about Shabbos. This set of six days is now coming to an end. Whatever was accomplished was accomplished, and whatever is left to do belongs to upcoming weeks, entirely new projects, and not to the week that just was. This week is

complete, and therefore, so is another aspect of creation, and with it, me as well."

And the proof of this is that the Talmud calls Shabbos "one-sixtieth of the World-to-Come," another reality altogether. According to the Pri Tzaddik, when we "land" on Motzei Shabbos, we are actually "new creations," and therefore, by definition, whoever we were last week ended with what we accomplished last week. Rav Dessler, in "Michtav Eliyahu," says a similar idea.

According to the Kabbalists, this is why we say the short prayer of "Anna b'koach" during "Kabbalat Shabbat." It comprises one of the 42-letter Names of G-d that prophets used to meditate on when trying to achieve prophecy. We use it to rise to higher level of spiritual consciousness called, that's right, "Shabbos."

In fact, according to Kabbalah, the concept of "Techum Shabbat," which literally means "Shabbat Border," not only refers to the distance to which one can walk on Shabbos beyond a settlement. It refers to the border between the world of the six working days, and the world of Shabbos itself, where work is not only prohibited, but superfluous.

Now, anyone who looks at Shabbos this way and observes it accordingly, can he build golden calves?

Have a GREAT Shabbos,  
Pinchas Winston

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