

SHABBOS: A DAY TO TEACH INDEPENDENCE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Remember the Shabbos to sanctify it. (Shemos 20:8)

IN ALL THE YEARS I have been writing I have barely written about Shabbos. I have addressed countless other topics but rarely Shabbos. Therefore, since it is fourth of the Ten Commandments given in this week's parshah, now is as good a time as any to discuss such a central topic.

The truth is that the matter of Shabbos first came up in last week's parshah:

So he said to them, "That is what God said, 'Tomorrow is a rest day, a holy Shabbos to God. Bake whatever you wish to bake, and cook whatever you wish to cook, and all the rest leave over to keep until morning.' " (Shemos 16:23)

It is a very large topic. It is a very important mitzvah. Shabbos is so central to Torah life that the Midrash says that properly observing it is tantamount to the keeping the entire Torah (Shemos Rabbah 25:12). It is one of those collective mitzvos that incorporate all of the individual principles embodied in the rest of the mitzvos.

Some of the reasons are obvious. Livelihood is one of the greatest concerns a person has in life, especially when he has a family to take care of. It is a great act of loyalty when a person abstains from making a living because God said to. It is a great expression of trust when a person does so believing that everything will work out for him even though he is spending less time making it so. Shabbos, therefore, proves the level of relationship that a person has with God.

A very important insight into Shabbos comes from the Talmud, though it is rarely used as such:

Rav Yehudah said in Rav's name: "Had the Jewish people kept the first Shabbos, no nation or tongue would have enjoyed dominion over them. It says, 'And it came to pass on the seventh day, that there went out some of the people to gather'" (Shemos 16:27), and this is followed by the verse, 'Then came Amalek' ." (Shemos 17:8). (Shabbos 118b).

This is interesting. The Talmud makes it seem as if the attack of Amalek was due to the fact that some Jews broke the first Shabbos by going out into the field to collectmann. The only problem is that this not what Rashi explains on the verse itself:

Amalek came, etc.: [God] juxtaposed this section to this verse, ["Is God among us or not?"]

implying, "I am always among you, and [I am] always prepared for all your necessities, but you ask, 'Is God among us or not?' By your life the dog will come and bite you, and you will cry out to Me, and [then] you will know where I am." (Rashi, Shemos 17:8)

As Rashi explains, Amalek's attack was the result of Jewish doubt in Divine Providence. They ran out of water and panicked, questioning if God was even among them. As the name "Amalek" implies vis-a-vis gematria ("Amalek" equals "suffek," the Hebrew word for "doubt"), Amalek is the result of questioning Divine Providence, not of breaking Shabbos.

The answer, of course, is that breaking Shabbos and questioning Divine Providence are one and the same mistake. A person who breaks Shabbos does so because of the fact that he has problems with Hashgochah Pratis—Divine Providence. To the extent that he does not believe in Divine Providence is the extent to which he will be able to break Shabbos.

This point is more sublime than it may at first appear. On one level it refers to a person's sense of God's omnipotence and omniscience. Someone who believes that God is everywhere and sees everything will be afraid to break Shabbos, even if keeping Shabbos is difficult for him.

On a deeper level it has to do with actually "feeling" the Divine Presence in life, feeling as if God is actually dwelling on the person. It is this feeling that allows a person to become "one" with Shabbos to the point that breaking Shabbos becomes a personal violation as well.

It's like prayer. You'll find that some people pray very slowly while others pray very quickly. Tip: Watch out for minyonim where most of the people are wearing running shoes and the Gabbai has a starting pistol. Just kidding, although in all honesty someminyonim could easily compete in the Olympics.

There are different opinions regarding the speed at which one should pray, though everyone agrees that prayer requires as much focus and concentration as possible. It is called the "Service of the Heart" for this very reason.

The point of disagreement is, what is the best way to achieve and maintain such focus and concentration. Some hold that going slowly and building concentration is essential whereas others are of the opinion that the term "wandering Jew" refers to the mind of someone praying when he takes his time. One just has to be careful that when casting his or her vote on which opinion to follow that it isn't his or her yetzer hara—evil inclination—that is having the final word on the matter.

When one person was asked why he spent so much time in his Shemonah Esrai, he provided an inspirational answer. He said something to this effect:

Firstly, it takes me a little while to build up my concentration. It is important for me to be emotionally involved in my tefillah as well as intellectually. I'm not always successful but when I am, there is little else in life that is as sweet, at least for me. It is not only the difference between saying the words and

meaning them. It is the difference between only meaning the words and feeling them in every part of my body. When the latter happens then I experience something amazing. It feels as if I'm talking to God, not from thousands of miles away, but as if He is right there with me, encompassing me, dwelling on me. All of a sudden it's as if time has stopped and I have all the time in the world to pray . . .

I've heard others say the same thing. These are people for whom the obligation to pray is more like an opportunity to be in the Presence of God. They don't need it to be the High Holidays to be inspired to reach for their spiritual best. They just need a good minyan.

In many respects it is easier to experience the Shechinah on Shabbos. Tefillah requires one to remain in one spot and work completely internally. Some people move around a bit, even "dance" a bit, to connect to the prayer experience. It is, however, mostly a meditative experience with which most people have little background.

Shabbos is so experiential. It talks to the mind and the heart at the same time. Last I heard Shabbos remains to be the number one outreach tool, convincing more novices about the validity of Judaism than any seminar has ever done. When Shabbos is approached with sincerity it talks to the body and the soul, "feeding" each what it loves the most.

To stop there, though, is like listening to music in preparation for prophecy but never getting the prophecy. Prophets used to listen to music to put themselves in the proper state of consciousness to receive prophecy, but it was only meaningful inasmuch as they received prophecy as a result. Likewise, Oneg Shabbos, or Shabbos Pleasure, is only meaningful inasmuch as it brings us to a presence of mind with which to feel the Shechinah all around him or her. This is what it truly means to "keep" Shabbos.

This is why Shabbos is associated with the manna. According to tradition, the sanctification of Shabbos by God at the end of the week of creating was the fact that the manna would not fall on Shabbos for the Jews in the desert, 2,448 years later. Instead the Jewish people were made to collect their Shabbos portion and prepare it on Friday for Shabbos.

To recall this we use two challahs at each seudah, at each Shabbos meal, reminiscent of the double portion of manna that fell on Erev Shabbos for the Jews of Moshe Rabbeinu's time. We put something under the challah and above it to remind us that this is the way the manna fell, enclosed between two layers of protective Heavenly dew.

That is on a simple level. On a deeper level the dew represented the level of all-encompassing Hashgochah Pratis, Divine Providence, the Jewish people were meant to enjoy, and would have, had they not doubted it. This is what God said:

"I am always among you, and I am always prepared for all your necessities, but you ask, 'Is God among us or not?'"

Manna, of course, is associated with parnassah, making a living. That's why it's called "money," which

in Hebrew means "my mann." Just kidding. But it is rather interesting, in a Divine Providence kind of way. The number one issue that tends to stand in the way of observing Shabbos is livelihood. Likewise, the number one issue that tends to interfere with one's relationship with God is livelihood, as the Torah says:

Beware that you do not forget God, your God . . . and you say to yourself, "It is my strength and the might of my hand that has accumulated this wealth for me." (Devarim 8:11, 18)

This was the test of the mann. The Jewish people were told to not go looking for mann on Shabbos, which sounds as if it was purely an issue of not breaking Shabbos. However, if God wanted to He could have made the mann available that would not have broken Shabbos.

He didn't. This is because it was about more than simply keeping and honoring the Shabbos. It was also about the message of Shabbos, which remains to be even at this late stage of history:

"I am always among you, and I am always prepared for all your necessities."

Independence is a wonderful thing when it serves to facilitate the completion of the purpose of Creation. It is meaningful when it allows people to become better vehicles for the revelation of Divine Providence, the purpose of life and the basis of reward in the World-to-Come. It is completely destructive when it results in just the opposite, as it has for so many throughout history.

The Jewish week is the perfect balance of six working days and one day of rest. We have six days of independence, so-to-speak, to use our God-given abilities and God-produced opportunities to be successful in making a livelihood. On the seventh day, however, we "reel" ourselves in by abandoning ourselves completely to God's will and abstaining from using our strength and might of hand to take care of ourselves.

In other words, for six days of the week we try and create a world into which we can invite God. On the seventh day, we let God be the "Host" that He truly is, so that we can be the "guests" that we truly are. On Shabbos, we allow ourselves to enter the world of the Shechinah so that we can maintain and even strengthen our relationship with God.

When we do that, we never have to ask about where our next drink of water will come from. We never have to ask, "Is God among us or not?" For sure we won't have to worry about being subjugated by any other nation in the world.

Text

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