

SHABBOS CHANUKAH

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Now Yosef recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. (Bereishis 42:8)

Shabbos Chanukah. In a sense, it is almost an oxymoron. Shabbos is one of the holiest days of the year, outdone only by Yom Kippur, the “Shabbos of Shabboses.” Chanukah is the most “profane” holiday of the year, because even Purim has some work restrictions.

Put Shabbos and Chanukah together, however, and you get something very different, something very Yosef-like. This comment probably makes little sense. If you understand Shabbos, Chanukah, and Yosef well, it will actually make a lot of sense. First, Shabbos.

There are many different ways to discuss what Shabbos actually is and what it represents. The very first description of Shabbos is from the Torah itself:

God completed on the seventh day His work that He did, and He abstained on the seventh day from all His work that He did. (Bereishis 2:2)

What was the world lacking? Rest. Shabbos came, and so came menuchah—rest. The work was completed and finished. (Rashi)

Shabbos is menuchah, which is translated as “rest.” The question is, what kind of rest? Since Shabbos is considered to be one-sixtieth of the World-to-Come (Brochos 57b), one would expect it to be the menuchah of the World-to-Come. The Talmud says, however:

Rebi Chiya bar Ashi said in the name of Rav: “Torah scholars have no menuchah either in this world or in the World-to-Come . . .” (Brochos 64a)

If menuchah is such an eternal concept, being associated with Shabbos, should it not be the reward of the righteous in the World-to-Come? Yet, it seems as if there is something better, something more eternal, and it awaits those loyal to Torah.

Furthermore, if Shabbos is menuchah, and talmidei chachamim keep Shabbos, should they not experience menuchah at least in this world every Shabbos? If not, why not?

As halachah teaches, the “rest” of Shabbos is very specific. Anyone who has had guests for Shabbos knows how hectic Shabbos can be, even without performing melachah. Though it is true that for many Shabbos is respite from the hectic life of the work week, it does not mean that everyone simply kicks back and chills out the entire Shabbos.

Rather, Shabbos is rest from "melachah," which is defined by the labors involved in building the Mishkan. Some labors were simple while others were complicated. They all had in common one thing: manipulation of the physical world through physical means. Melachah is man using his creative ability to PHYSICALLY "adjust" the material world for a PRODUCTIVE purpose. Menuchah is the cessation of all such activity.

However, there is more than one way to accomplish such creative results. It can be done physically and spiritually, and even science and psychology have come to acknowledge this. We know that thoughts are powerful enough to impact the physical reality, even manipulate it.

If that is surprising, it is only because we have grown up thinking otherwise. The worst part of this fourth and final exile is the exile of the Jewish imagination. We have come to look at the world as Eisav has always looked at the world: very physical, and only changeable through physical action. We know that Kabbalah says differently, but we believe that no one has the ability to use Kabbalah that way anymore.

Even Eisav is coming around these days, albeit very gradually. Science has come to better understand the physical world, and how the human brain works. This new knowledge points in the direction of energy being beyond the physical realm, and capable of changing the physical world through non-physical means.

There are statements in the Talmud and countless Midrashim that speak about the power of thoughts (kavanah) and words to create or change realities. Beyond eyeshot, we do not give much weight to such ideas and instead depend upon God to do this for us if we comply with His will. We completely undermine the ability God has given us to help shape history and rectify Creation.

Pity. Actually, more like tragic, because we will be held accountable for having used our thoughts and words to impact the world, whether we believed we could or not. How will a person feel on his day of judgment when he finds out how his "simple" thoughts and random words actually changed history negatively? How will he feel when he finds out how much power he really had to use thought alone to improve the world, and yet didn't?

Back to the main point. Menuchah is not the cessation of ALL creative activity. It is the cessation of PHYSICAL creative activity, at least as defined by the construction of the Mishkan. Shabbos is not a time that we stop being creative. It is the time that we switch modes from the creative activity of "Olam Asiyah" to the creative activity of "Olam Yetzirah." This will become clearer with some background information.

Kabbalah explains that there are five levels of reality. The lowest two are called Asiyah—Action—and Yetzirah—Formation. Our world is on the level of Asiyah, and the Garden of Eden was on the level of Yetzirah. This gives you an understanding of the difference between both worlds. Yetzirah is paradise, and our world at present is far from that.

Except on Shabbos. On Shabbos the world changes, at least for those keep Shabbos properly. For the Shomer Shabbos, the world ascends from the level of Asiyah to that of Yetzirah. This is how Shabbos becomes one-sixtieth of the World-to-Come. This is also why physically creative work becomes forbidden: it is tantamount to acting on the level of Asiyah in the realm of Yetzirah, a real profanation.

Thus we say the tefillah "Anna b'Koach" in Kabbalos Shabbos. This is the special prayer used to ascend to a higher spiritual level, specifically for the sake of receiving prophecy. It is at that time that we enter the "Techum Shabbos," that realm of Shabbos on the level of Yetzirah. Our world may look the same physically at this point, but it is very different spiritually.

It is also the point at which we go from the level of PHYSICAL melachah of Asiyah to the SPIRITUAL melachah of Yetzirah. It is the time we cease being creative through physical means and instead return to being creative through spiritual means—the reality of the Garden of Eden.

A person only needs menuchah from physical creativity, not from spiritual creativity. The latter is the level that should never cease, and it never does for a true talmid chacham. There are many stories that illustrate this point, and the following is one of the more famous ones.

When Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky was young, he was set up on a shidduch with the sister of the Chazon Ish. The day after the shidduch occurred, the Chazon Ish asked his sister how it went. She answered him, "He does not hear well, he does not know how to dress, and in the middle of the shidduch he called out, 'The Rambam!' as if he had been thinking in learning the whole time!"

The Chazon answered his sister: "He may not hear well, but soon everyone will hear of him! As for the way he dresses, he can be taught otherwise. And," the Chazon Ish told his sister, "Anyone who can think of the Rambam while on a shidduch you should especially marry!" She did, and Rabbi Kanievsky eventually became the Steipler Gaon, one of the greatest Torah leaders in the last 100 years.

Torah scholars do not have menuchah in this world because they don't need it. They are already creative primarily on the spiritual level, limiting their physical involvement in the physical world to receive what they need. They will not want menuchah in the World-to-Come, because they will continue on with their spiritual creativity forever. That is part of the reward they will receive later for their Torah devotion now.

Shabbos, therefore, is about ascending from this world to a higher one. Chanukah, on the other hand, is about bringing the higher one down into the lower world. This is why we light the Menorah so close to the ground, to symbolize the drawing down of the holy light of Creation to the lowest parts of Creation—our world. Thus the holiday seems so "chol" compared to others, including Purim.

In a sense, Chanukah represents the light of Shabbos in the chol realm, the world of Asiyah. Shabbos Chanukah represents the light of Chanukah in the holy realm, the realm of Yetzirah, a taste of the

messianic era. It represents what is supposed to ultimately happen, when everyday will have the holiness of Shabbos, even during the six working days. Creativity at that time then will be on a much higher level, that of Yetzirah.

This was Yosef HaTzaddik. He walked the face of this earth, but he was really from a higher level of existence. This is why he was able to be a conduit for the word of God, a "Revealer of Hidden Matters." It is also why his brothers did not relate to him, denigrating him until he was later vindicated. When that occurred, they saw just how holy he really was, and how he was the one bringing the light of Yetzirah down into the world of Asiyah.

The brothers also saw how Yosef had the ability to ascend to a higher spiritual level, like Chanukah on Shabbos. Yosef represents the sefirah Yesod, which can ascend and descend as required by the situation and moment in history.

The truth is, this is a quality that every Jew experiences when he reaches a high level of bitachon or trust in God. Anyone who truly reaches such a level feels above everyday existence, as if he is no longer bound by the laws of physical Creation. This is why miracles happen for the person with bitachon. He has truly accessed a higher level on which miracles are commonplace and nature is out of place.

This may not be easy to achieve, but Shabbos comes once a week to help us move in this spiritual direction. Chanukah comes once a year to give us a boost. When Chanukah comes on Shabbos, it is double the opportunity for such phenomenal growth.