***Into the Depths of Shabbos: A Taste of the World to Come***

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Imagine you are on a train, heading towards your destination. You look to your right and see a fellow passenger. Attempting to be friendly, you kindly ask him where he is heading. He shrugs his shoulders and says, "I don't know." You do a double take, and ask again. He repeats, "I'm just riding the train. I don't know where I'm going." At this point, you begin to wonder if this guy is out of his mind. Who goes on a train without a destination in mind?

However, if you go over to your average person on the street and ask them the same question, “Where are going in *life?* What's your ultimate destination?”, they will probably give you a similar answer. They’ll shrug and say "I don't know". However, if the absence of a defined destination for something as simple as a train ride is so clearly absurd, how can we fail to treat life the same way? Life, the most important journey we will ever take, must surely require a clearly defined and meaningful destination. This week's parsha, Vayakhel, opens with the command to keep Shabbos. Since Shabbos takes up one seventh of our entire lives, let us try to gain a deeper understanding of this unique and beautiful day.

1. ***Shabbos as Fundamental***

It is striking to consider how fundamental Shabbos is in Jewish thought. Shabbos is included amongst the Aseres Hadibros, the Ten Commandments, which are viewed not only as uniquely important, but, as Rashi explains, the root categories that contain all the other mitzvos. (Rav Saadyah Gaon describes at length how every mitzva falls under one of these ten categories.) Furthermore, the punishment for desecrating Shabbos is not just death, but skilah, stoning. According to most opinions, this is the most severe of the four death penalties. To compound the point, when we consider whether or not someone is an observant Jew, we usually ask whether he or she is "Shomer Shabbas," Sabbath observant. Why is this the defining feature of religious observance? What makes Shabbos a root mitzvah, why is its punishment so severe, and why do we see it as the measuring stick for all of Torah observance? What is the secret of Shabbos?

1. ***Theme of the Day?***

Usually, when we have a specific time of kedushah, a holy point in time, there is a unique positive act that we associate with it. On Rosh Hashana we blow shofar, on Sukkos we sit in the sukkah and shake the lulav, on Chanukah we light the menorah, on Purim we read the megillah, on Pesach we have the seder, and on Shavuos we learn Torah. On Shabbos though, we tend to think less about what we are meant to be doing, and more about what we are *not* allowed to do. The issur melacha, the prohibition against creative actions on Shabbos, seems to dominate our focus. We can easily fall into the trap of associating Shabbos with only restrictions, with an unfortunately negative connotation. These prohibitions can seem to take over the day, leaving us feeling restricted, limited, or even trapped.

1. ***A Taste of Olam Habah?***

In a very enigmatic and cryptic manor, the gemara in Brachos 57a compares shabbos to Olam Habah- the world to come. The exact terminology is "mei'ein olam habah", shabbos is a taste of the world to come. Once again, we are left to wonder, what is the deeper meaning of shabbos? In order to answer all of our questions we need to first understand the difference between Olam Hazeh- this world- and Olam Habah- the world to come.

1. ***This World and the Next***

Olam Hazeh- the world *we* live in- is the place of process. In this world you get to choose who you will become. Every single day presents you a new opportunity to become even greater than you were the day before. This world is therefore the place of movement and becoming, where we progress down our personal path of change and growth. Olam Habah-the world to come- in contrast, is the place of being, where you experience everything you have built in this life. No longer can we move or become, no longer can we build. Rather, we experience a static world, lacking both movement and process, where we enjoy everything we created during our lives in this world.

The joy of this world is the ability to grow, to learn, to become. The pain is that it is limited; we are only in this world for a short period of time and then we leave. The joy of the World to Come is the ecstatic enjoyment of everything we've built during our lifetime. The pain is that it's only that, nothing more. All the potential we failed to actualize will remain eternally so, merely potential.

This can be compared to a person who is given a pile of clay and one hour to mold it. During that hour, he can create anything he wants, impress any form he desires into the clay. After the hour, the clay is taken and placed into the kiln and whatever form he created during that hour will remain forever. So too, we receive a lifetime in this world to mold ourselves. During our time here we have the free will to create ourselves, to grow. Once we leave this world, we remain forever as the beings that we created.

What’s important to realize, though, is that the reward in the World to Come is not merely an external reward, some “goodie” given to you in exchange for the good deeds you performed. Rather, the reward is in fact *you*, the consciousness and self that you created during your lifetime. As the Ramchal and the Nefesh Ha'Chaim explain, when you die, your mind and consciousness are peeled away from your physical body, almost like taking off a coat, and you exist eternally as the essential being that you have created. [In truth, there is movement and process in Olam Habah as well, albeit, a very different type; it is a growth based on expanding everything you began building during your lifetime.]

1. ***Weekdays and Shabbos***

The weekdays parallel this world, a time to physically create, build, and grow. Shabbos is more than just a day of rest, it's a taste of Olam Habah; we cease creative physical activity and experience what it means to simply exist. This is the spiritual parallel to our transition from this world to the next. In this world we have the chance to grow and build, in the next we cease our creative activity and experience everything we have built. Shabbos is the ultimate reminder that our lives have an end point, and that the result is only as great as every bit of effort that we put into building it. On Shabbos we reflect on what we've built and become, both in the preceding week and in our entire life leading up to this point.

This is why, despite the fact that we may pause our physical growth on Shabbos, we don’t stop our spiritual growth; in fact we actually place special emphasis on it. This is because the experience of Olam Habah within Shabbos should be one that compels us to take advantage of this world, to further build, develop, and grow. Shabbos is the reminder that one day we will no longer have the opportunity to take advantage of this world, our response should be to redouble our conviction to do so. We can then enter into the next week rejuvenated and inspired to become even more.

This is also why the gemara in Brachos specifically says that shabbos is 1/60th of Olam Habah. In halacha, if something is less than ``1/60th it has no taste. Therefore, in cases of bittul if it is less than 1 in 60 it is considered nullified. Here, the gemara is explaining that shabbos is just enough of a taste of Olam Habah that it is not nullified, but not more than that. It's a glimpse into another dimension.

1. ***Halachic Applications***

With this understanding of Shabbos, let us look at a couple of halachos and features of Shabbos that illustrate this message. There is an interesting halacha that if a muktzeh object is resting on a table when Shabbos enters, the entire table takes on a muktzah status.  However, what if that muktzeh object then falls off the table an hour after shabbos begins. Does the table lose its muktzah status?

No. The halacha is that the table retains its muktzah status, as this was its status when shabbos entered. Why? Because Shabbos is compared to Olam Habah, and once you enter Olam Habah your status becomes static, unchanging. So too, an object that receives its muktzah status at the outset of Shabbos retains its original halachic status.

1. ***Magdil and Migdol***

In the second to last passage of birchas ha'mazon, the blessing after bread, we say the word "magdil" during the week but "migdol" on shabbos. Why is this so? While there are many suggested answers, I would like to suggest my own, based on the aforementioned ideas. Magdil means to *enlarge*, to grow, to make bigger. During the week we grow, we become. Migdol means a *building*, a tower. On shabbos, we take a step back and observe the building we've built, we enjoy the experience of everything we have created during the week.

1. ***Shabbos: Focusing on Destination***

Shabbos is a time to focus on destination, to ask ourselves: "where am I going in life? What are my goals? What am I trying to accomplish?". Sadly, many people lose focus of the bigger picture, of what's really important in life. Many people work, eat, sleep, and repeat. They live for weekends and vacations. There are too many people who fall into the trap of getting by; they get an education, a job, find a spouse, retire, and die. However, this is not what we were created for! Each and every single one of us has the potential for greatness, and our job in this world is to find our unique greatness and bring it to life.

Every business has regular meetings to discuss their goals. Every athlete has a specific exercise regimen, diet, and sleep schedule to ensure maximum performance. They both constantly track their progress and make alterations accordingly to make sure they are progressing towards their target. Yet, when it comes to the important things in life, such as the goal of our lives, our families, our spiritual growth, how often do we create concrete goals? How often do we sit down and measure our progress and then recalibrate accordingly?

1. ***The Goal of Shabbos***

Every shabbos needs to be an existential and meditative experience. The first step is to enjoy everything you've become, everything you've created. The second step is to take a reflective step back and look objectively at yourself, as an outsider. We need to have the courage to go into a room, by ourselves, and ask the important questions: Who am I? What drives me? What makes me unique? What are my talents? What are my passions? What can I contribute to the Jewish people and the world as a whole? But most importantly, how am I doing in life? Am I achieving my goals? Is there anything which needs more work, more attention?

The last step is to redirect and recalibrate. Just like a GPS recalibrates when you veer off the path, shabbos is where we need to do the same for our life-trajectory. Life comes down to the decisions we make, and Shabbos provides us with the opportunity to make the decisionto become more. Every decision you've ever made in your entire life has led you to this very moment, which also means that any decision you make from now on can forever alter your life for the better. Shabbos is when we regain perspective on who we are, where we are headed, and what decisions we must make to become our best and truest selves. May we be inspired to fully experience Shabbos, a taste of Olam Habah, and use this taste of destination to unlock our true greatness.

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