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The Mishkan, Shabbos, and the Thirty-Nine Melachos

Not On Shabbos!

When Bnei Yisrael began to build the Mishkan, they were specifically commanded (in *Parshas Ki Sisa*) not to build it on Shabbos. Despite the importance of constructing a Mishkan that would allow Bnei Yisrael to experience the presence of the *Shechinah*, Hakdosh Baruch Hu said, אַךְ אֶת שַׁבָּתִי תִשְׁמְרוּ - *Nevertheless you must keep my Shabbos.* (31:13)

This is because on Shabbos, the *Shechinah* fills the entire world, in the same way that it dwelled in the Beis Hamikdash. Building the Beis Hamikdash is necessary and relevant during the weekdays, when the *Shechinah* is hidden; that is when we're commanded to reveal it. However, on Shabbos, the *Shechinah* is revealed in the world, and it isn't possible to build a dwelling place for the *Shechinah*.

By forbidding us to build the Mishkan on Shabbos, the Torah reveals this unique revelation of the *Shechinah* that takes place on Shabbos.

Back to the Beginning

The *Tiferes Shlomo* writes (*Bechukosai*),

It is explained in the writings of the *Arizal* that even in our times, when the Beis Hamikdash is destroyed, and there is no *avodah* and bringing of *korbanos* – on Shabbos, all of the *yichudim* and elevation of the worlds take place just as they did before the sin of Adam Harishon. Therefore, on Shabbos we lack nothing, even though we are in a state of *galus*...

Later in the *sefer* (*Shabbos Chazon*), he writes that in the three weeks of mourning (between 17 Tammuz and Tisha B'Av), when each Shabbos comes, the *simchah* in the heavens is even greater.

Shabbos is identified with redemption, *geulah*. During the three weeks, the *galus* of the weekdays is darker and deeper than it is throughout the year. Therefore, when we enter Shabbos, the turnaround of redemption and the joy we experience are even greater than on other *Shabbasos*.

In the *zemer Kol Mekadesh Shevi'i*, we sing, וביום השבת שישו ושמחו – *On the day of Shabbos, rejoice and be happy*, but we address these words specifically to אוהבי ה' המחכים בבנין אריאל – *Those who love Hashem who wait (in the weekdays) for the building of the Beis Hamikdash*. Those who truly long for the *geulah* and the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash are able to rejoice in the *Shechinah's* presence on Shabbos.

We must internalize this idea, if we hope to truly experience Shabbos. On Shabbos, there is no *churban*. Even when Tisha B'Av itself comes out on Shabbos, we don't mourn. In fact, *sefarim kedoshim* teach us, on that Shabbos the world experiences the greatest elevation, from the depths of *churban* to an existence that rises above any imperfections, and resembles the world as it was before the sin of *Adam Harishon*.

The *Tiferes Shlomo (Bechukosai)* continues;

This is the meaning of the *pasuk* אֶת שַׁבְּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וּמִקֻּדְשֵׁי תִירָאוּ (Vayikra 26:2). The Torah tells us, “When you will keep my Shabbos, it will be considered as if you are standing in a state of awe in the actual Beis Hamikdash.” ...

Today, when we don't have the Beis Hamikdash, the revelation that Shabbos brings (despite the *churban*) is even more powerful than that which took place in the Beis Hamikdash, and it is a more complete expression of love.

Making Shabbos

However, for this elevation to take place, Klal Yisrael must keep Shabbos according to the halachah. Many *sefarim* explain that this is the meaning of the phrase אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת לַעֲשׂוֹת – *to make the Shabbos* (Shemos

31:17). By keeping Shabbos, it is as if Bnei Yisrael actually build a Beis Hamikdash.

We know that *brachah* is found wherever there is *hashra'as haShechinah*. The *pasuk* says (Shemos 20:20), בְּכֹל הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֶזְכֵּיר אֶת שְׁמִי, אָבֹא אֵלַיָּהּ וּבֵרַכְתִּיהָ – *Everywhere that My name is mentioned, I will come to you and bless you*. Just as building the Beis Hamikdash, a physical place of *hashra'as haShechinah*, brings *brachah* to the world, so too, Jews who keep Shabbos bring *hashra'as haShechinah* to the world, and with it an abundance of *brachah* in *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*.

Before the First Sin

The Tiferes Shlomo's explanation clarifies why, on Shabbos, we have to be careful to avoid speaking or thinking about unfinished work. We must divert our minds from anything that is lacking in the world, and anything that causes sorrow or worry. On Shabbos, we try to live in the world as it was before the sin of Adam Harishon.

Mekubalim explain that before the sin of Adam Harishon, the world was full of good, and impurities (*pesoles*) were barely present. One aspect of that reality can be seen in Chazal's statement (*Sanhedrin* 59b) that Adam Harishon did not have to work for his bread. It was simply available, prepared for him.

The *Beis Aharon* (*Parshas Vayakhel*) elaborates on this idea. Of the numerous *melachos* that are required to produce an edible loaf of bread, all of them involve separating the edible from the inedible (אוכל from פסולת). This process is not limited to the production of bread. Everything we hope to achieve requires us, first of all, to go to the effort of bringing out the good that is intermingled with bad.

For example, as the date of a wedding approaches, the parents of the *chosson* and *kallah* spend months preparing and arranging everything. There are countless decisions to be made, and all of those decisions are really a process of *birur*, of separating good from bad and identifying the best choice in each situation. The same applies to choosing a *yeshivah* for your son, or finding a *shidduch* for your daughter. It's a

very confusing process, and it can be very difficult to separate what's good for your children from all the options that may be bad for them.

Why did Hakadosh Baruch Hu design such a confusing world, in which it is so difficult to identify the right choice? Why didn't He design things in a way that makes the correct choice clear from the beginning? The answer is that Hashem really did create that bright, clearly defined world. It was Adam Harishon's decision to choose evil that strengthened the power of evil in the world to the extent that it is now intermingled in every aspect of the world.

This process didn't end with the life of Adam Harishon. It continues and increases to this day. Each time a person sins, the power of *ra* is strengthened, and it becomes more intermingled with *tov*.

If not for Adam Harishon's sin, we wouldn't need to plow, plant, thresh, winnow or do any of the other *melachos* necessary for the production of bread. Our bread would be ready and available. So too, even though evil would exist, it would be clearly distinct from good. It would be separate and distant from us. Our *nisayon* would be simply to keep our distance from *ra*. Each time we decided to avoid *ra*, we would internalize pure *tov* without even the slightest residue of *ra*.

The Thirty-Nine Melachos

The *Shelah hakadosh* (*Maseches Shabbos - Ner Mitzvah*) explains the significance of the number thirty-nine.

Chazal said in *Pirkei R. Eliezer Hagadol* (14), "Adam, Chavah, the serpent, and the earth were cursed with thirty-nine curses." That is why one who sins, and is contaminated by that same *ruach tumah*, is punished with ארבעים חסר אחת - thirty-nine lashes (*malkos*).

The *Shelah hakadosh* adds,

With this, we understand the Tanna's choice of words in *Maseches Shabbos* (73a), אבות מלאכות ארבעים חסר אחת - "There are forty-minus-one *avos melachos* forbidden on Shabbos."

The Gemara asks why the Tanna said 'forty minus one' instead of simply thirty-nine. The Gemara answers that the Tanna wanted to use the same terminology that the Torah uses in the context of the punishment of *malkos*. The Torah describes the punishment as *יכנו ארבעים* - *he will strike him forty times*, and Chazal explained that 'forty' in this case means thirty-nine. (There are explanations in *sod* as to why the Torah uses that terminology for the number of lashes).

The thirty-nine *melachos* are necessary in the world that exists after those thirty-nine curses, and they also parallel the inner meaning of the thirty-nine lashes. That is why the Tanna expressed the number of *melachos* as "forty minus one."

The Shabbos–Mishkan Connection

The *Beis Aharon* (based on *sifrei kabbalah*) explains that originally, the entire world was a place of *hashra'as haShechinah* (like the Mishkan). Once Adam sinned, the world was damaged, and every aspect of the world became intermingled with *ra*. This caused the *Shechinah* to remove its presence from the world.

After leaving Mitzrayim, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to build the Mishkan in a way that would create a place of pure good, with no connection to *ra*. Then, the *Shechinah* would be able to reside in the Mishkan, in the same way that it dwelled in the entire world before the sin.

In order to remove any trace of *ra* from the Mishkan, Bnei Yisrael had to utilize thirty-nine forms of *melachah* in constructing it. Betzalel had the wisdom to guide their *melachah* in a way that would filter out all impurities from the Mishkan. The resulting Mishkan resembled the world as it was before the first sin - entirely good.

Just as the thirty-nine *melachos* created a space that was free of *ra*, the thirty-nine *melachos* that we perform during the week serve to separate *ra* from the sacred stretch of time called Shabbos, the day of pure goodness. Once we accept Shabbos, there is no need for any of

the thirty-nine *melachos*, for there is no intermingling of *tov* and *ra* that needs to be separated. Shabbos is entirely good.

If a person entered the Mishkan and began plowing and planting, we can understand that his *melachah* would be seen as a criminal act. All the *melachah* of constructing the Mishkan was focused on *birur*, removing even the slightest residue of *ra* from the Mishkan. Once that work produced the structure called the Mishkan, its very definition as a place of pure *tov* negates the need for *melachah*. Someone who performs *melachah* in the Mishkan is not only denying its nature; he's also denying the original, purely good nature of the world that is restored within the walls of the Mishkan.

The same is true of a person who does any of the thirty-nine *melachos* on Shabbos. Shabbos brings us back to a time before *melachah* and *birur* were necessary.

Acknowledging What's Missing

Whenever a person talks about what's lacking and painful in the world, in a certain way he is saying that Hashem didn't create a perfect world. Suppose we go to a wedding and find the parents of the *kallah* busy in the kitchen, preparing and arranging the food. They are clearly making a statement that the caterer hasn't provided satisfactory service.

So, what are we to do? We live in a world of so much pain, where so many people are in need. Don't we have to identify those problems and do what we can to rectify them?

There are two ways to reconcile the need to act and repair with the obligation of *emunah*.

The first is to remember that Hakadosh Baruch Hu commands us to alleviate the painful situations of the world. However, as a Yid throws himself into the tasks assigned to him by the Torah, he must also remember that these painful situations only exist because sin exists. The *cheit* of Adam Harishon is not an event that occurred in the past and has nothing to do with him. He must acknowledge: "Hashem created

a perfect world, and I spoiled it; I was part of the *neshamah* of Adam Harishon. Because of my sin, the world was damaged, and now I have to work hard to separate the good from the bad.”

To revisit the *mashal* of the wedding: We see the *kallah's* parents slaving away in the kitchen, but what if they forgot to hire a caterer until one hour before the wedding? At the last minute, they begged him to cook a meal for hundreds of people and provide waiters to set the tables and serve the dinner. The caterer said to them, “Now you remember?! It’s much too late. I can send you waiters, but you are going to have to roll up your sleeves and help them.” When the wedding guests arrive and find the parents so busy in the kitchen that they have no time to welcome guests, the parents have to explain that this odd situation is not the caterer’s fault. They must accept their blame for the situation.

The Approach of Shabbos

The second way to approach the problems of the world comes from Shabbos. A person who sees the needs and the pain that surround him should say, “Even now, Hashem’s world is in a state of *shleimus*, just as it should be. The problem is that I can’t see that with my eyes, or understand it with my mind. *Baruch Hashem*, once a week I am able to step into a world that is entirely good, where I need to do nothing.”

Let’s try to illustrate this with a *mashal*. A father tries to find the right yeshivah for his son, without success. He tries everything possible, but sees no hope on the horizon. He may take the first approach we described: to do everything that he can think of, while remembering that it is *cheit* (including his *cheit*) that has made the situation so difficult.

However, suppose he runs into a friend who is associated with one of the yeshivos, and the friend lets him know that his son was accepted three days ago, and the yeshivah has already sent out an official letter of acceptance; it just hasn’t yet arrived at his door. This friend is letting him know that his situation is already good, even though he can’t yet see tangible evidence of that goodness.

Let's look at other examples. A person has children of marriageable age, and no money to marry them off. There is a solution – it exists – but it is distant, and he has no idea where or what the solution is. This is the true nature of every difficult situation we have to face.

Someone is seeking a *shidduch*. His match is out there, but he has no idea who, or where the person is. He has to work hard, investigating and meeting one candidate after another, in the hope of finding his *bashert*.

In all these cases, the person in need can take the first approach of humbling himself, davening, and searching again and again. That is the approach most of us have to follow in our day-to-day lives.

But on Shabbos, we take the other approach. The weekdays are the time for searching and investigating. On Shabbos, a person is supposed to feel “כאילו כל מלאכתך עשויה – as if all your work is done.” (*Mechilta*, quoted by Rashi on Shemos 20:9, ועשית כל מלאכתך.) On Shabbos, he still won't see the *shidduch* or the source of funds that is prepared for him; but nevertheless, by entering the world of Shabbos, he will feel calm, confident that the solution to his problem has already been prepared.

A Talmid Chacham Resembles Shabbos

The *Tiferes Shlomo* explained that before the sin of Adam Harishon, everything he needed was prepared and available. He did not have to work to meet his daily needs. Today, this ideal state exists only on Shabbos. We look forward to the future which is described as יום שכולו שבת, a day that is entirely Shabbos, when the world will no longer be tainted by *ra*.

However, *talmidei chachamim* are described in *sefarim* as בחינת שבת, the aspect of Shabbos. The *talmid chacham* learns to view the world through “Shabbos lenses” even during the week. Someone once observed Rav Aharon of Belz, when he spent time in Marienbad for his health. He was so immersed in Torah and *avodah* all week that just before Shabbos, he shut the light and turned it back on, in order to actually feel the transition from the days of *melachah* to Shabbos.

Even someone who is not on that *madreigah* might choose to adopt the Shabbos-based approach to his troubles on a weekday. He can strengthen his *emunah* and *bitachon* to the extent that he enters another world where he has everything that he needs. This isn't as easy as it may sound, and a person who tries it has to be very careful. Laziness may lead him to delusions of being a great *ba'al bitachon*, because he wants to avoid the *hishtadlus* that he must do. It requires a lot of work to reach that level of true *emunah* and *bitachon*.

But Shabbos is different. On Shabbos, every Jew has the *zechus* and the obligation to enter that world where all of his work is done. This is why every Jew is forbidden to work on Shabbos.

If someone does transgress and do *melachah* on Shabbos, it is equivalent to planting and plowing in the middle of the Mishkan, as explained above.

If the Beis Hamikdash were rebuilt today, we can imagine that many people would find it a difficult *nisayon* to refrain from doing everyday tasks within its walls. We would need to post large signs asking people to respect the *Beis Hamikdash* and please leave their cell phones at home. We might have to appoint guards to enforce that requirement.

If we think about this scenario and realize what a *bizayon* it would be, we can get a sense of what a *bizayon* it is to speak about business or other weekday matters on Shabbos.

When a Yid refrains from *melachah* on Shabbos, he testifies not only that Hakadosh Baruch Hu created the universe, but also that He created a complete and perfect universe.

Two Complementary Approaches

We can now understand the following teaching of Rav Elimelech of Lizhensk, who explains the two approaches we described above and how they complement each other.

Consider a person who works all week with a sense of *ידי ועוצם ידי*, believing that his talent and hard work are solving his problems. His

identity and his sense of being alive are closely linked to his weekday accomplishments. He may even thank Hashem for creating a world filled with so many problems that he can fix with his own ten fingers. When this person approaches Shabbos, he cannot really appreciate the mitzvah of refraining from work on Shabbos.

On the other hand, consider someone who works all week with the understanding that his labors are only necessary because the sin of Adam Harishon caused *ra* to become intermingled with *tov*. His intention in his work is to separate and purify the *tov* from the *ra* that has tainted it. Then, as he approaches Shabbos, he will rejoice in the day of *menuchah*, when he is no longer obligated to perform the *melachah* that is necessary during the week. He can stop, now, and enter the world of Shabbos: a world where all is good, as it was meant to be from the beginning.



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