

# VAYAKHEL

## THE LIGHT OF *SHABBOS*

*Parashas Vayakhel* returns to the description of the *Mishkan*'s construction that was introduced in *parashios Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*. At the beginning of our *parashah*, before Moshe *Rabbeinu* begins directing *Bnei Yisrael* about collecting the materials for the *Mishkan*, a seemingly superfluous verse stands out. Moshe suddenly mentions the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos*. "Six days work shall be done and the seventh day shall be for you sanctified, a Sabbath for Hashem..."<sup>1</sup>

Why did Moshe *Rabbeinu* specifically mention the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos* before continuing the instructions for the construction of the *Mishkan*? We know that the events of *parashas Vayakhel* occurred on the day after Moshe *Rabbeinu* came down from *Har Sinai* for the third time, after Hashem forgave the Jewish people for *Cheit Ha'eigel*.<sup>2</sup> On this first day after *Yom Kippur*, Moshe *Rabbeinu* sees fit to command everyone to remember to keep *Shabbos*. The unusual placement of this verse is significant. We

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<sup>1</sup> *Shemos* 35:2.

<sup>2</sup> *Rashi on Shemos* 35:1.

need to understand the centrality of *Shabbos* and why it plays such an important role after the *Cheit Ha'eigel*.

## Body and Soul

To better understand the power of *Shabbos*, we need to go back to the very first *Shabbos*. Let us explore the events of the beginning of time, before the sin of Adam *HaRishon* (the first man).

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander explains<sup>3</sup> that Adam *HaRishon* lived in a very different reality than ours. Quoting Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Rabbi Friedlander says that before Adam sinned, all of his actions were *avodas Hashem*. Even his very physical involvement in the world was inherently spiritual. His physical body was simply a passive vessel for his divine soul. That is why the Torah tells us that “the two of them were unclothed, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed.”<sup>4</sup>

Rabbi Friedlander says in the name of the Maharal that shame is an emotion you feel when you realize there is a contradiction between your actions and your knowledge of truth. Adam *HaRishon* and Chava had no such contradiction. Every action of theirs was an expression of spiritual truth. Their bodies had no independent identity separate from their souls. Their G-dly souls were masters over their material existence.

After the sin, however, there was an intermingling of good and evil throughout the world – both inside and outside man. Physicality and sin were now internal tendencies of man when dealing with the physical. Physical involvement with the world is

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<sup>3</sup> *Sifsei Chaim*, vol. 3, p. 407.

<sup>4</sup> *Bereishis* 2:25.

not the same as physicality. Physical is: *I put food in my mouth*. Physicality is: *I like putting food in my mouth because it tastes good*. Sin is: *I like putting food in my mouth because it tastes good so much that I'll do it even if someone tells me it's going to damage me spiritually*. Before the sin, the physical served the spiritual. After, the physical tended to serve itself, or even worse.

Rabbi Matis Friedman brings<sup>5</sup> the classic story of a *chassid* and his *rebbe*. The *chassid* witnesses his *rebbe* making a *berachah* on an apple like an ordinary person. The *chassid* momentarily doubts his greatness and thinks, “How is the *rebbe* any greater than I? I also make a *berachah* on an apple!” The *rebbe* reads this *chassid's* mind and answers, “You make a *berachah* so you can eat the apple. I, however, see Hashem's great Glory in the world and want to bless Him. But I can't just say a *berachah* ...so I take an apple in order to make a *berachah*.”

Physical involvement in the world is necessary; we need to eat to survive. Before he sinned, Adam's involvement in the physical world was like eating an apple for the sole purpose of making a *berachah*. After Adam's sin, the quality of physicality included a separate desire to eat a tasty apple for personal satisfaction. This new physicality is in and of itself a problem, and it also puts us at risk for sin, since our drive for physical contentment might overpower our desire for spiritual elevation.

Before the sin of Adam *HaRishon*, the physical and spiritual were in balance and the world was in a state of perfection. When we will be redeemed, we will return to this state of perfection. Our Sages say that “In the future the land of Israel will put forth rolls of bread and silk clothing.”<sup>6</sup> The Maharal explains<sup>7</sup> that this is a

<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Matis Friedman, *Parsha Sheets, Vayikra*.

<sup>6</sup> *Shabbos* 30b.

<sup>7</sup> *Netzach Yisrael*, chapter 50.

return to the natural course of events before the sin of Adam *HaRisbon*. Bread literally grew on trees. Agricultural products came out of the ground ready for consumption, complete and perfect.

After the sin, Hashem announced to Adam the following consequence: “by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread.”<sup>8</sup> Consider the intensive physical labor involved in making bread: Even after the wheat is planted, watered, harvested and winnowed, it is still indigestible. Wheat then needs to be ground into flour. Baking bread at this point in the process is still a big time investment including sifting, kneading, let it rise, shaping and baking. Many people prefer going to the bakery instead of baking from scratch, even when flour is readily available! The “sweat of our brow” is the labor we now have to apply in order to extract the edible portion from the wheat.

We cannot understand Adam *HaRisbon*’s punishment as simply forcing him to make bread from scratch. Hashem wanted the sweat of Adam’s brow to be applied to the process of extracting the good from the wheat, which is a mixture of edible and inedible parts. The effort involved in the transformation of wheat to bread was symbolic of how Adam would need to function in the world. Hashem was charging him with the life-long mission of extracting the good from the confusion of good and evil in the world.

Humankind would forever be challenged to find the spiritual purpose within the physical realm. A famous verse in *Kobeles*<sup>9</sup> reads: “*Ki Adam ein tzaddik ba’aretz asher ya’aseh tov ve’lo yechta* (no man is a righteous person on this earth who will do good and will not sin).”

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<sup>8</sup> *Bereishis* 3:19.

<sup>9</sup> *Kobeles* 7:20.

Rabbi Friedlander<sup>10</sup> explains according to the *Nefesh HaChayim* that people cannot live *ba'aretz* – in this physical world and “*lo yechta*.”

The word used for “sin” implies the concept of “*lebachti es hamatarah*,” literally missing the mark. This phrase evokes archery imagery of bow, arrow and bulls-eye. Adam *HaRishon* and all his descendants would eternally struggle to aim for the good amidst all the evil. But since humankind now has the drive for physicality, it is almost impossible to live in this world and not have some element of physicality even in the good we do.

However, all the different *melachos*, the physical acts of creation in this world, have *mitzvah* components within them. Those are the opportunities to remove the “physicality” from the physical, to separate out the good from the evil. There are opportunities to avoid sin, and opportunities to avoid seeing physicality as an end in and of itself.

Much of Jewish life is centered around food, so it’s a helpful example. When we prepare food with which to sustain our bodies, for example, we avoid cooking milk and meat together. We have the guidelines of *kashrus* to separate us from the potential sinful components. We can also cook food for a spiritual purpose, like preparing *se’udos* (festive meals) for *Shabbos*. Preparing food *lichvod Shabbos Kodesh* (in honor of the Holy Sabbath) separates us from this concept we’ve had implanted deep within us since the sin of *Adam HaRishon* that involvement in the physical is for the sake of physicality, and connects us to the appreciation that the physical is for the ends of spirituality.

Every physical act, when done with the proper intention, is a means with which to connect to Hashem. The *Mishkan* was a quintessential example of how physicality can be used for spirituality. Its labor was all-inclusive: planting, harvesting,

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<sup>10</sup> *Sifsei Chaim*, vol. 3, p. 408.

kneading, building, sewing, weaving – all for the sake of bringing the Divine Presence down to earth.

So if these *melachos* are so lofty, why are they prohibited on *Shabbos*? Furthermore, why is kindling fire the only *melachah* specified here: “*lo seva’aru aish bechol moshvoseichem beyom haShabbas* (you should not have any fire kindled among your house on the Sabbath day)”?<sup>11</sup>

## Putting Out the Fire

*Shabbos*, as we know, is *me’ein Olam HaBa* – a glimpse of the World to Come. In the future, we will permanently return to that world and the level of Adam *HaRishon* before the sin. *Teshuvah* is usually interpreted as “repentance,” but its literal translation is “returning.” Repentance is our returning to Hashem and restoring our souls to a pre-sin, purer spiritual state. The *pasuk* describing our *teshuvah* at the end of days reads, “*Veshavta ad Hashem Elokecha veshamata bekolo* (and you will return to Hashem your G-d and listen to His voice).”<sup>12</sup> The Slonimer Rebbe notes<sup>13</sup> that the word *veshavta* (return) has the same three Hebrew letters as the word *Shabbos*.

The *Nesivos Shalom* goes on to explain how on *Shabbos*, the prohibition of creative labor encourages us to subdue our natural physical drive for control. Seforno points out<sup>14</sup> that fire is a necessary element for all kinds of work. Man’s achievements in technology and his mastery over the physical world are mainly dependent upon the controlled use of fire in varied forms. The

<sup>11</sup> *Shemos* 35:3.

<sup>12</sup> *Devarim* 30:2.

<sup>13</sup> *Nesivos Shalom, Devarim*, p. 202.

<sup>14</sup> *Seforno on Shemos* 35:3.

prohibition against fire, therefore, more than any other *melachah*, implies the suspension of man's domination over the universe. When we think we have limitless power over the universe, we are on the threshold of idolatry. Furthermore, fire itself invokes dramatic imagery of the flame from which emerged the Golden Calf. The prohibition of kindling fire on *Shabbos* is our ultimate *teshuvah*, since it serves as a reminder to never again kindle the destructive fire of idolatry.

Another approach to the cessation of *melachos* on *Shabbos* stems from *Shabbos* being *me'ein Olam HaBa*. It is a glimpse of the World to Come, the world in which we will return to the level of Adam *HaRishon* before the sin. "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread" will disappear. We will not have to work to distance ourselves from the mixture of good and evil, from our distorted perspective of the physical. We will have done the work of this world, of expending great effort to remove sin from our physical involvement, to remove physicality from our physical involvement. We will be ready to just – be spiritual. To spend all our efforts working directly on our relationship with Hashem, without our mixed-up, good-evil, physicality perspective tying us down. Our physical actions will at that point be complete, whole, perfect – no refining necessary to make them a natural platform for our spiritual work.

So on our *Shabbos*, we refrain from any actions that deal with refining the physical. We have, in a sense, arrived. We get to be spiritual beings, for whom even physical actions naturally serve the spiritual.

Rashi defines<sup>15</sup> our *neshamah yeseirah*, the extra soul we receive on *Shabbos*, as "expansiveness of the heart for rest and for joy and to be open to relief and he shall eat and he shall drink and his soul

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<sup>15</sup> Commentary on *Beitzah* 16a.

does not get disgusted.” Rabbi Chaim Friedlander questions<sup>16</sup> the virtue of eating and drinking. Why is that defined as the benefit of the lofty *neshamah yeseirah*?

During the week, physical involvement like eating and drinking can easily lead to physicality. Being drawn towards physicality makes one’s soul become “disgusted.” But on *Shabbos*, we receive this *neshamah yeseirah*, this added boost of *kedushah* (sanctity) that makes our tendencies spiritual-oriented, *Olam HaBa* (World to Come)-oriented. We can therefore eat and drink for the *mitzvah* of *oneg Shabbos* (pleasure of Shabbos) and it will take us toward spirituality, not physicality. This is in line with our soul and its awareness of the spiritual truth, and so it is comfortable, not disgusted, with those physical actions.

Our souls rejoice in this temporary restored balance of physical and spiritual. Rabbi Friedlander warns us, though, to maintain a proper mindset. If on *Shabbos* we overeat like gluttons and oversleep like sloths, our *neshamah yeseirah* remains dormant and we have sunk even further into physicality. We need to consciously put in the effort to direct our physical actions on *Shabbos* towards their spiritual ends.

## A Real *Shabbos*

To understand more about how *Shabbos* is *me’ein Olam HaBa*, let’s take a closer look at the *Amidah* (silent prayer) of *Shabbos*. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe notices<sup>17</sup> a simple contradiction.

At the end of the middle *brachah* (blessing) of every *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Shabbos*, we say, “*Kadsheinu bemitzvosecha ... vebanchileinu*

<sup>16</sup> *Sifsei Chaim*, vol. 3, p. 411.

<sup>17</sup> *Alei Shur*, vol. 2, p. 385-386.



*Hashem Elokeinu be'ahavah uveratzon Shabbas kodshecha...* (sanctify us with Your commandments ... and bequeath us, Hashem our G-d, with love and with favor your holy *Shabbos*...)."

It sounds like we are asking Hashem to sanctify us and make us holy through *Shabbos*. This request seems to contradict what we say in many of our *berachos*, "*asher kidshanu bemitzvosav* (Who sanctified us with His commandments)." This statement is in the past tense, implying that we have **already been sanctified** by His *mitzvos*! So are we asking to be sanctified in the future or are we already sanctified? Furthermore, we also say in *Kiddush*, "*VeShabbas kodsbo be'ahavah uveratzon hinchilanu* (and His holy *Shabbos* with love and with favor He bequeathed us)." If Hashem already bequeathed us the *Shabbos*, why do we ask for it again in every *Shabbos Amidah*?

Rabbi Wolbe's insight enlightens us about the nature of *Shabbos* and the entirety of the *mitzvos*. In one sense, we are already sanctified; we have received the *mitzvos*. On the other hand, we are still lacking *kedushah*. We perform the *mitzvos*, but often we are just going through the motions. We *daven* (pray), we give *tzedakah* (charity), we put on *tefillin*, we keep *Shabbos*... Often our *mitzvos*, even *Shabbos*, don't impact our relationship with Hashem. Our inner self is not involved, and we are not being elevated as a result.

Most of the time, we conduct our external lives doing *mitzvos* without thinking about whether or not we are uplifted by the *mitzvos*. *Shabbos* is our weekly opportunity to remember the ultimate purpose of *mitzvos*, says Rabbi Wolbe. *Shabbos* is *me'Ein Olam HaBa*. *Shabbos* is a time when we have a hint of how connected we are to *Olam HaBa*, to a world in which our relationship with Hashem is central. *Shabbos* is a time to be real with ourselves, with where we stand on the physicality-spirituality continuum. We ask Hashem, "*Kadsheinu bemitzvosecha*" – sanctify us with Your *mitzvos*! Please, help me internalize the *mitzvos*. Help me use them to improve myself! We repeatedly ask in our *Amidah*, "Bequeath

us the holy *Shabbos*!” Please, help me have a real, internal *Shabbos*. Help me eat, sing, rest, live in a way that connects me with You!

It’s a challenge we all face. We are flesh and blood, physical beings dependent on the material world for our bodies to survive. It’s difficult to become more internal, more spiritual. *Shabbos* is one of our prime opportunities. Our *neshamah yeseirah* gives us an additional dose of *kedushah*. *Shabbos* is also an opportune time for reflecting on the purpose of the Creation: the goal of life is our relationship with Hashem. *Tefillah* is a powerful tool to that end, asking Hashem to help us live for that connection in everything we do – “sanctify us with Your commandments and place our portion in Your Torah... and bequeath us, Hashem our G-d, with love and with favor your holy *Shabbos*...”

## Glowing with the Light of *Shabbos*

Although mankind lost its innate connection with spirituality through the sin of Adam *HaRishon*, at one historical moment we had the chance to get it back. At *Matan Torah*, the spiritual state of *Am Yisrael* was restored to that of Adam *HaRishon* before the sin. Our Sages said<sup>18</sup> that when *Am Yisrael* replied “We will do” before “We will hear,” they received two crowns. However, when they sinned with the calf, these crowns were taken away and given to Moshe *Rabbeinu*.

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander explains<sup>19</sup> that these crowns made “the skin of Moshe’s face shine.”<sup>20</sup> How can we understand this imagery? What do the crowns and the shining represent?

<sup>18</sup> *Shabbos* 88a.

<sup>19</sup> *Sifsei Chaim*, vol 3, p. 409.

<sup>20</sup> *Shemos* 34:35.

The crowns given to us at *Matan Torah* were not a reward, but rather the natural consequence of restoring our spiritual state to its prime. Our wholehearted acceptance of the Torah allowed our souls to rule over our bodies; we became as pure as Adam *HaRishon* before the sin. Once we fell from grace with *Cheit Ha'eigel*, only one person was left untainted: Moshe *Rabbeinu*. The word “shining” means that it reflects light. A shiny silver cup for example, is described as such because its surface is reflecting light. Moshe *Rabbeinu*’s skin was shining because the surface of his physical body reflected inner G-dly light. This was the same type of light that Adam *HaRishon* had before the sin: the physical was the servant of and the platform for the spiritual, and nothing else. It did not tend toward physicality; it did not lean toward sin – nothing that would detract from its purpose. The rest of us, however, lost those crowns; a silver cup that is tarnished doesn’t shine.

We are waiting for our redemption to return to that perfect spiritual state, to get the crowns back permanently. *Shabbos*, the taste of *Olam Haba*, gives us a glimpse into that future. Rabbi Friedlander quotes the *Pri Eitz Chaim* of Rabbi Vital stating that “Moshe returns the crowns to *Am Yisrael* on *Shabbos* night.” The *Baal HaTurim* deduces<sup>21</sup> this idea from the juxtaposition of *pesukim* (verses) in the Torah. The last *pasuk* of *parashas Ki Sisa* reads, “the skin of Moshe’s face shone,”<sup>22</sup> and *parashas Vayakhel* begins with the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos*. Thus, the *Baal HaTurim* concludes that “the shining of one’s face on *Shabbos* is different than on other days.” This radiance, our ability for our physical existence to be a pure channel for spirituality, is qualitatively different on *Shabbos*.

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<sup>21</sup> Commentary on *Shemos* 35:1.

<sup>22</sup> *Shemos* 34:35.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik relates<sup>23</sup> a story about the people from his hometown in Europe. He vividly describes the hardworking manual laborers such as the porters and the water carriers. Most of them were not educated, but they “were sincerely pious Jews who willingly sacrificed for their spiritual commitment.” He remembered meeting a frail, short man whose job was to carry heavy metal pieces. From observing the lines on the man’s face and the thick cord binding the load to his body, the extremely strenuous nature of his work was obvious to Rabbi Soloveitchik. One *Shabbos* Rabbi Soloveitchik saw this same Jew and did not even recognize him. Although the man wore a tattered *kapota* (long black coat) covered with patches, his face shone with the joy of *Shabbos*. In Rabbi Soloveitchik’s continued, “I recognized in a tangible fashion that a person’s *Shabbos* countenance is totally different than his weekday appearance.”

Now we can understand why *Shabbos* is discussed immediately after the *Cheit Ha’eigel*. Although we lost our crowns and our ability to let our souls shine through our physical existence as a result of *Cheit Ha’eigel*, Hashem gives us an opportunity to experience this ability once again through the gift of *Shabbos*. Once a week we can ascend to the level of Adam *HaRishon* before the sin. On *Shabbos* we can restore the crowns, the crowns of the physical serving the spiritual. We get a *neshama yeseira* so we can live again a completely spiritual existence. Our bodies and souls eat, sing, and rest *lichvod Shabbos Kodesh*. We have the opportunity to examine if our *mitzvos* are sanctifying us and changing our internal selves. May we utilize the light of *Shabbos* and shine it forth, making our physical selves a reflection of the light of Hashem. May we merit reaching that great day of redemption, the day that is wholly *Shabbos*.

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<sup>23</sup> *The Ray*, vol 1, p. 160.