

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

TEHILLIM: THE BOOK OF PSALMS

by Rabbi Avi Baumol

Introduction to Kabbalat Shabbat:
The Dual Nature of Shabbat Observance

When we think of the day of Shabbat, what springs to mind? At first blush we would conjure up images of creation, with the words of the Torah resounding: "And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done" (Genesis 2:3). God, having spent six days "creating," adds, blesses, and sanctifies an additional day (forming a universally acknowledged concept of seven-day week, see Rabbi Yehuda Ha-levi "Sefer Ha-kuzari 1:57) to refrain from His work - to rest. (1)

This universal notion of the Shabbat found its way into the Jewish liturgy, as the Friday evening Kiddush service uses this section as an introduction to the two blessings that are recited -one on wine, the other on the "holiness of the day."

Another famous passage recited in the morning Kiddush service is found in Sefer Shemot. "The Israelite people shall keep the Shabbat, observing the Shabbat throughout the ages as a covenant for all time: it shall be a sign for all time between ME and the PEOPLE OF ISRAEL. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he ceased from work and was refreshed (Exodus 31:16-17) (2).

Emerging from the passage is the notion that an unseverable link was created between God and His nation. The symbol of that bond is the Shabbat. It is not a coincidence that this idea directly precedes the handing over of the

"luchot ha-berit" the stone tablets, acting as the culmination of the pact between God and Israel.

In contrast to the first account of a universal concept of Shabbat as a day of rest, this passage reflects the unique relationship between God and His chosen nation - Israel.

Taking into account these two distinct narratives concerning the Shabbat, what we witness is a duality in the nature of the day. On the one hand it is universally recognized as a day of rest -one in which all of mankind acknowledges God as the Supreme Creator. On the other hand, it is a special day for Israel perhaps earned by Israel (3), whereby an added element of the Shabbat takes form - not only a day of physical rest, but of spiritual rejuvenation.

"You shall keep the Shabbat for it is holy for you. He who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his kin" (Exodus 31:14).(4)

This notion of duality in the nature of Shabbat can be aided by, and can contribute to a greater understanding of the Friday evening Kiddush service. In order to fully appreciate this analysis, let me quote the text in full:

"Blessed are you our God, creator of the universe ...

(A)

Who made us holy with His commandments and favored us, and gave us his holy Shabbat, in love and favor, to be our heritage, as a reminder OF THE CREATION.

(B)

It is the foremost day of the holy festival marking the exodus from Egypt. For-OUT OF ALL NATIONS - YOU CHOSE US and made us holy, and you gave us your holy Shabbat, in love and favor, we inherited (5). Blessed are you Lord who sanctified the Shabbat."

A strange redundancy exists in the prayer. In (A) we acknowledge God's giving of the Shabbat in favor and love, as a heritage. In (B), with almost the exact same terminology we find the same concepts - favor, love, giving of the Shabbat... What, then, is the difference between (A) and (B)?

While much of the prayer is similar, we clearly notice two distinct reasons for the Shabbat. In (A) it is a reminder for the creation, in (B), it is a reminder (6) of the exodus from Egypt. Perhaps what this displays is our universal/national distinction, and the author of the prayer was attuned to this duality.

In the first half we acknowledge the day of Shabbat as a day of rest, a day set up by God so that ALL His creatures can declare Him the Supreme Creator and King of the universe. As we recite this, we include ourselves amongst the greater population of the world, as we were included in mankind when God created the world. Our relationship to God in this realm is not more unique than anyone else's, hence, the third person is used to express a more general view of us as God's creations. Our role, along with everyone in the universe, is to honor the day, and recognize God as the one who created this day along with the rest of the world.

A drastic change takes place in the second half of the prayer. The audience shifts from the general populace of God's creations to the specific people God has chosen to be His nation. When did the children of Jacob evolve into the "nation of Israel?" In the exodus from Egypt, upon God's declaration, "And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God" (Exodus, 6:7).

In this section of Kiddush, the voice changes from a removed third person, to speaking directly to God. YOU have chosen us, You have loved us, and in response, have given

Shabbat to us. But along with this chosenness, comes additional responsibility. The "universal day of rest" theme, is joined by the "neshama yeteira", the spiritual aspects of the day.

It is not only a day to relax, and recognize God, but one to withdraw from the physical world, and surge towards God in the spiritual one. For this reason, all the negative laws come into play. In addition to the mitzva of "kibud ve-oneg" - honoring and deriving pleasure from Shabbat, we are inspired with "shemirat ha-Shabbat" - the countless laws which, when adhered to, help sanctify the day, rendering it a true symbol of the covenant between Israel and God.

In Pesikta Rabbati (23), we find a line appropriate to the issue we have been discussing. Working off the classic midrashic interpretations of "zakhor ve-shamor" (the two versions of the commandment of Shabbat found in Exodus 20:8, and Deuteronomy 5:12, respectively), the author of the Pesikta remarks:

"Zakhor natan le-umot ha-olam; shamor natan le-Yisrael" (the concept of zakhor was given to the nations of the world; shamor was given to Israel alone).

"Zakhor", the idea of remembering and recognizing the Shabbat is the responsibility of all those for whom God created during the six days of creation. His "resting" should be acknowledged and respected.

"Shamor" represents the additional responsibility of the chosen people - to guard, protect, the day from evolving into a mundane, "typical" day. Through the "spirit of the day," supported by the specific laws pertaining to it, we rise, soar, and elevate ourselves to greater heights.

This theme of duality in the nature of Shabbat, of our attitude of the day being reflected through the eyes of God's creatures as a whole, and God's chosen people in particular, is fundamental to understanding the six Psalms in the Kabbalat Shabbat. Looking for structure in these psalms, we notice an interesting phenomenon. Psalm 95 begins with an all-encompassing call - "lekhu neranena." Subsequent to this, four psalms appear in succession, or rather two sets of two. You will notice that there are two titled "shiru la-Hashem shir chadash" (sing a new song to God), and two which begin with "Hashem Malakh" (God reigns). (7)

*This, and other lectures on Kabbalat Shabbat, is based on thoughts gleaned from several important books on the topic. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, in "Shiurim Le-zekher Abba Mari", Vol.2, has several articles: "Kiddush and Havdala" p. 105, "Mitzvat Kiddush", p. 123, "Kiddush Ke'mekadesh HaShabbat", p.138. Rav Mordechai Breuer, in "Pirkei Moadot", "The Shabbat", pp. 23-48. Professor Jacob Bazak, in "13 Psalms of The Shabbat Day Prayers". Others instrumental in helping me formulate some of these ideas are Rabbi Hillel Novetsky and Mr. Aryeh Wiener, thanks.

Endnotes

(1) An interesting source can be found in Masekhet Soferim which states: "In the conclusion of the blessing on Kiddush there is no mention of Israel, just 'one who sanctifies Shabbat,' since Shabbat preceded Israel."

(2) The Talmud in Beitza 16a, uses the word "va-yinafash" as a source for the Jew being inspired with a "neshama yeteira" an extra soul, on the Shabbat. For an analysis of this concept please contact me and I will direct you to an article on it.

(3) This leads us to a discussion of whether the chosenness of Israel is based only on "Brit avot" the covenant between God and the patriarchs, or did the children of Israel play a role in "earning" their special relationship with God? I believe in both, but that is the topic for another lecture.

(4) The unique relationships carries with it great responsibilities, and sometimes grave repercussions. A death sentence exhibits the seriousness of the adherence of this day as one that defines the Jew in his society.

(5) The word "hinchaltanu" differs from "hinchilanu" in a grammatical context, in that the latter speaks in third person - he gave us as a heritage, while the former speaks in second person - you gave us.

(6) The word reminder--"zikaron" is used, perhaps intentionally, to set up a parallel between the two fundamental reasons for Shabbat. This parallel, on a philosophical plane, reminds us what we share with, and how we differ from, the rest of the world.

(7) You will notice that I mentioned nothing about the sixth psalm. This is due to the fact that depending on what custom you have, that psalm might be different. In the order of the Tehillim it is psalm 100, while in many of the Siddurim it has become psalm 29. An analysis is in order, and is forthcoming.