

The Secret of Shabat Observance

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In order to understand the true nature of Shabat observance, one must begin with an understanding of the nature of human consciousness. Without knowing well what it means to be human, one will never properly understand all that is Torah. Torah was given to human beings. How does one expect to understand the Torah all the while that one does not understand oneself? Shabat was not given to human beings merely to serve as a day of physical rest as so commonly believed. Shabat is so much more than this. Shabat is actually a level of human consciousness. Unless one actualizes the internal Shabat, it is hard to imagine how one can come to understand and appreciate the external Shabat.



Not for naught do our Sages of the Kabbalah teach us that one receives an extra soul on Shabat. The teachings of the Ari'zal even elaborate the specific times when one receives each portion of the addition three-fold soul, both by night and by day. Receiving an extra soul does not mean, as is so erroneously understood, that something not already within us comes down to us anew from Heaven. This is a misunderstanding of the concept. Rather, on Shabat, an inter-dimensional vortex is opened that enables us access to deeper realms within our own inner/higher self. Our conscious minds experience this added depth as something foreign, yet familiar. It feels and seems to be as if we received something new. On the contrary, all we do is to reconnect with something very old, our most original and highest self. This to us seems new.

Shabat is to be understood from its two contexts mentioned in Torah. First, Shabat is observed in memory of the entire process of creation. Second, Shabat is observed in memory of the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt. On the surface these two events appear unrelated. Yet, Sages throughout the centuries have written numerous works to show how the two relate. Their philosophical discussions are not what concern us now; therefore I choose not to elaborate on them. Instead, we must understand each event individually and then explore its relationship to human consciousness. With these insights we will see how they relate to the natural flow of life-force energy through expanded consciousness and how this relates to the ritual observance of the Shabat.

We all know that in the beginning G-d created His world in six days. After each period of action, called a day, there was an equal period of inaction called night. Yet, night was never called a time of rest. It was not considered a Shabat, it was still considered a time of work. Yet, the seventh period, both day and night is called Shabat. Therefore, we must logically concluded that the Shabat must entail more than just a mere cessation from creative activities, for if this was all there was to Shabat

observance, then every night period during creation when no active activity occurred should equally be considered Shabat and we know that this is not the case.

Shabat as a day of rest is a metaphor for the pinnacle of creation. It is creation's final period and its completion. The Shabat level of creation was the entire purpose of the process. It is the period when all the pieces have fallen into place and there essentially is nothing more to do. Only when everything is in its place and every purpose accomplished can we say that there is rest. This then is Shabat. In memory of this primordial Shabat do we observe today's Shabat. Yet, in order to properly understand this relationship we need to delve further into how and when the original Shabat occurred.

Modern myth and primitive thinking interpret the Biblical story of creation literally as the written word says. Yet, every Biblical scholar with knowledge of ancient Semitic writings recognizes that the Torah, written in the language of man, follows the natural form of the literature of those days. It was the norm of ancient Semitic writers to constantly intersperse poetic metaphors throughout their prose writings. When our Sages taught that Torah was given in the language of man, this does not mean that Torah was given to us within the mind-set of later Greek philosophy or as a document of history. No, the form of the written Torah is indigenous to the Hebrew people of the time of its revelation. They always thought in metaphors, therefore much of Torah is metaphorical and all of it has multiple layers of deeper meanings.

Our Sages have long taught that G-d has no form or semblance of form, yet the Torah always mentions G-d's Hand, G-d face and many other anthropomorphic expressions. Many interpret these literally and conclude that G-d has a physical form similar to us humans. Yet, for millennia, ever since our Torah was translated out of the original Hebrew, our Sages emphatically teach us that these anthropomorphic references to G-d are nothing other than a literary device to help our limited human minds to understand much deeper concepts represented by these symbols. The story of creation happening in six days, each of 24 hours as we today measure time, is another one of these metaphors. Maimonides and a number of other Sages state that the creation story of Genesis is a metaphor and through it the entire process of creation is revealed and explained. However, the actual events may not be as simple as their symbolic representations recorded in Torah. Yet, knowing the minds of men, G-d gave us Torah in the form He did. There it is, in its simplest form, for simple-minded people and still, it contains deeper truths for those so properly prepared to discover them.

Another understanding of the creation story is found in the Rabbeynu Bahya commentary. Here the six days of creation are said to reflect (and prophesy about) the six thousand year period of the coming history of humanity. Only when human history is complete will we all then enter into the "great" or "cosmic" Shabat, where everything on Earth will have reached its pinnacle and will be at peace.

Ultimately, we commemorate the Shabat as "zekher l'ma'aseh bereshit" (the act of creation) to focus us on our true relationship with our planet and our own human history. We observe Shabat at the end of every cycle of seven days to remind us that all human history is but a cycle and at its conclusion all must be in balance and be at peace. Although throughout the world, many cultures have their own calendars, such as the standard Christian/secular, the Jewish, Muslim and Chinese, still regardless of the different counting of months and years, everyone still follows a seven day week, with Saturday/Shabat the seventh day. Maybe there are some minor exceptions to this rule amongst some remote tribes, but for the vast majority of the world, the apparently arbitrary measurement of days into seven day cycles seems to be universal.

From the point of view of Shabat being a zekher l'ma'aseh bereshit, we can recognize its relevance to all humanity and not just to Israel. We are all created in the Divine Image. In spite of Israel's unique calling and relationship to G-d, all the nations of the world are G-d's children and are included in His great plan for the development and evolution of humanity. Within each of each, down to the genetic level, we are products of the Earth, from whose "dust" we have been created. Who we are and what we are permeates every fiber of our being and fundamentally forms our consciousness. As we each have the dust of the Earth within us both genetically and psychologically so too does each of us have spark of the Shabat within us.

Yes, each and every human being on this planet, created in the image of G-d is "hotwired" to somehow know that humanity is fated for a higher destiny, one in which we will all live in peace and harmony with one another and with every other element on our planet. It is ingrained within each of us, Jew and Gentile alike. We have been formed and essentially programmed to know that there is a coming "cosmic" Shabat and many of the world's great thinkers have tried to format its image in their minds, using the constructs and ideas relevant to their time and place. Any time any philosopher thought of an utopia, he did so because the idea of the cosmic Shabat was aroused within his soul.

In this respect, for every human being, Shabat, the seventh day, should be remembered and honored as being something special. Universal Shabat observance should not follow the Jewish model simply because the whole world is not Jewish and is not meant to be. Nowhere in any Biblical or Messianic prophecy does it ever state that the utopian destiny of humanity will entail the mass conversion of the world to Judaism. Such a concept is foreign to us and unwelcome. G-d created us all with our own differences. Those differences which keep us apart we must address and learn to overcome. Those differences which make us unique as cultures and nations are to be cherished and maintained. The Biblical concept of the future is that all the different nations finally learn to live together in peace, each being who they are and respecting each other. Nowhere does it say that all nations and cultures will be blended together into one homogenous whole.

The cosmic Shabat will be a time when all humanity will be able to know and experience G-d directly. We all will have evolved beyond our petty differences and beyond the need to make war and inflict pain on those different from us. There will still be independent nations and various cultures and languages, but rather than have these divide us, they will instead serve to enrich greater collective humanity. How this will all come about is a topic outside our present scope, but nonetheless we firmly believe that this collective human destiny will indeed be reached. This is the cosmic Shabat and every seventh day, the conclusion of every weekly cycle; we remember just how good things can get. That is why we are all supposed to take a day off from work and rest, pray and otherwise give thanks for all that we have and aspire and dream about that which we do not have, but someday can.

This universal knowledge and awareness of the ultimate goal of humanity however much ingrained within us at the cellular level still remains dormant and deep within our collective unconscious. The vast majority of humanity has not yet risen to the awareness of knowing that there is a greater world coming. In order to serve humanity as role models and as conduits for a higher consciousness G-d took to Himself a single nation and laid upon them a formidable task. Be holy and live as an example of what is to be, shine the light to the nations and let them learn what is within their individual selves and what must shortly be unleashed for the good of all.

The relationship between Jew and Gentile is rather simple. We are both integral and essential ingredients in humanity. Our difference is not anything more than in our function and role. Compare the Jew and Gentile to the directions of vertical and horizontal. The role of the Jew as chosen priests

is to humble themselves in the service of others. The role of the priest is to serve as the vertical connection between Heaven and Earth. The priest is the one who brings Heaven down to Earth. Yet, once this is accomplished, that piece of Heaven must be spread throughout the entire Earth. This is supposed to be carried out by everyone, Jew and Gentile alike. The great role of humanity is to spread the highest aspirations and goodness to one another. It is the role of each of us to transform our jungle of a world into a garden paradise. Remember Shabat keep us focused on just what it is we are supposed to do.

Centuries ago, the Jewish people were slaves in Egypt. We were redeemed through rather supernatural means. G-d brought us out of Egypt and to Mt. Sinai. There we were told not only to remember the Shabat but also to observe and safeguard it in very precise ways. These ways and this observance are to remind us of our exodus from Egypt. Yet, if one does not truly understand what the Exodus was supposed to mean, then one will never understand the meaning of its relationship to the Shabat and its unique form of observance.

When Israel was redeemed from Egypt their freedom from bondage was not only political and social, it was also psychological. We were emancipated internally and no longer had reason to seek out and serve any other master. We were taught the true meaning of individual freedom. This was all solidified when Torah was received on Sinai. Each and every ritual law in the Torah reflects this truth and shines this light. The Shabat especially, with all its prohibitions of forbidden labors, is an archetypal expression of the ultimate state of human psychological freedom, the pinnacle of human development, where humanity is in total harmony with the natural world around us, with ourselves and with one another. This is the ultimate state of completion, which in Hebrew is called Shalom. This also underscores why the traditional Shabat greeting is Shabat Shalom. In essence, we wish one another to be aware of what the Shabat is essentially supposed to mean.

Most do not understand the relationship between the prohibited activities that define the Shabat and the essential meaning of what the Shabat is. For this we turn to an understanding of our own inner human workings and the secrets of the mind. We must understand a simple yet profoundly true psychological concept. All of our experiences in this physical world come through the mind. The individual human mind always interprets what it experiences in a highly individualized way. In essence everything that we see, hear, smell, touch and taste goes through the filter of the brain and is experienced differently by every single individual. Everything that we consciously perceive is thus filtered through the lens of interpretation.

However, the world around us has a reality to it far beyond our limited perceptions of it. The only way we can experience this true element of the reality around us is to bypass conscious thought and all the filters it contains. True reality is therefore perceived within the unconscious areas of the mind. Now, at this unconscious level, reality is perceived equally by all, however, in order to express it, we again each chose our individual symbols. These symbols become what we call archetypes, specific symbols that have a general universal meaning if not for everyone then at least for a specific group. These are what we call the archetypes of the collective unconscious. It is here that mitzvot observance becomes completely understood and its importance realized.

The specific and unique way that G-d ordained for the Jewish people to observe the Shabat (and the other mitzvot) gives expression to the inner and concealed archetypes of the Jewish collective unconscious. This is how the deepest levels of our inner selves expresses itself and speaks to our conscious mind a message through symbols that when understood properly can transform the world. This is how ancient Hebrew used to think and another reason why the Torah uses metaphors.

Essentially, Torah metaphors are all archetypes, and our Sages have long known this and built upon this principle much of the religion of Judaism.

On Shabat we must not only remember but actualize the reality that the ultimate goal and pinnacle of human existence is when all will be in harmony; when humanity will be at peace with itself, with nature and with Heaven. This is a state of psychic and physical balance. It is expressed as humanity surrendering itself to Heaven, acknowledging ourselves as being part of the natural world and allowing the natural world to take its natural course. We are not to interfere.

Our interference means any expression of our extending any dominance anywhere in the public domain. Therefore on Shabat, we do not carry anything into a public domain, however small or great, for this shows our mastery over such objects, that we can move them at will. Everything is supposed to be in equilibrium. We cannot have our personal desires upset this delicate balance. For the same reason, we do not ignite any fires; for this is an expression of transformational energy. Shabat is not the time for transformations. It is the time for harmony and balance. This requires the maintenance of the status quo, not its manipulation, however small that might be.

We disconnect from the outside world in order to travel within. Therefore we do not tolerate any distractions. This is why we turn off all our technology and remove ourselves from any type of business environment or distracting entertainments. We perform no creative activities that could take the focus of our consciousness off the psychic focal point of the meaning of the moment. Although the world around us goes on as normal; through a shift in our consciousness, we take a vacation from the normal world and go beyond it.

Now here is an area that confuses many people. How is it that every Shabat the world around us goes on as normal and only we ourselves are required to observe the Shabat laws? Although we light no fires on Shabat, there are still thunder storms, which light forest fires. All the laws of nature continue on Shabat and from a natural point of view Shabat is no different from any other day. This is, of course, totally true. Shabat day is a day like all others. Its difference is not to be found in the external world, at least not yet, not now.

Shabat today is only a psychic precursor for the times which are yet to come. Yet, in order for us to remain focused on that level of human development and destiny we, the priests of humanity, must elevate our consciousness to connect with this time psychically, even before the long awaited new dawn will raise upon us in future history. It is our mental and psychic connection that makes Shabat in this world to be Shabat. Although we have laws to observe regarding Shabat observance and they must be followed, these laws are a means to an end and not an end unto themselves.

Our observance of Shabat laws is meant to alter our consciousness and to redirect our minds to that psychic realm which is yet to come in history, but accessible today through our inner psychic travels and connections. When we observe Shabat properly in this world, we unleash its limitless power throughout the six-day work week. We bring into the world around us a higher element and consciousness, one that makes us strive to be better and to be a light to the nations, showing by example how we can each strive towards the highest spiritual human heights.

Proper Shabat observance is a mental/psychic affair. This reality underlies many of the Shabat laws. For example, if one were to be lost in nature and lose track of time, not knowing when the seventh day of the week is; one counts from the day he thinks may be Shabat and then observes the Shabat seven days later, even if this day is not Shabat. Therefore, one so disoriented can end up observing a full

Shabat on a Friday or a Sunday (or even a Wednesday) and not on the actual seventh day. In such a case, the individual is considered to have fully observed the Shabat regardless of what day he actually did observe it on. This is so because what is important, more than the actual observance is what is in the individual's mind.

Intent means almost everything. Therefore one so lost, not knowing the proper times, can express his intent in the best possible manner. However, those of us not under similar circumstances could never do this same thing. If we were to choose to observe the Shabat on any other day we would be knowingly deviating from the norm and from the community. Such behavior violates the nation's collective consciousness and thus takes a serious toll on the individual soul.

Shabat observance is the foundation of what it means to be a member of Israel. This is why Shabat observance is the true sign of one being Torah observant. Without Shabat, one cannot come close to Heaven. Indeed, with proper Shabat observance, no Jew can even come close to their individual inner selves. Shabat is a psychological transformation that enables us to actually travel through time and space through the vehicle of the mind, to visit and experience a higher mental state; to taste it, enjoy it, and to bring back a small portion of it into our regular everyday lives and work week. In this way, we bring a little bit of Heaven down to Earth. This is, after all the job of all Israel. Once we have brought it down to Earth, it is the job of the others, our brothers in humanity to pass the noble ideas and thoughts around and to build a wise and stable civilization upon them. Mind you, even our brothers in humanity can be noble and lofty souls who also contribute to the revelation of these wisdoms.

Shabat observance has been embellished by our Sages for centuries specifically to focus us on our national mission. All Shabat laws, either Biblical or Rabbinic all are designed to enable us to elevate our human consciousness and to assist us to touch the Divine. Shabat laws are not mere symbolic behavior; they are an actual living and acting out of internal psychic archetypes of the national collective unconscious of Israel. This is why Gentiles may very well honor and commemorate the Shabat but they cannot observe it as does a member of Israel. Our psyches emanate from different sources and our roles on Earth are also different. Therefore, we each pick up our respective mantle and thus we each fulfill our individual duty. Thereby together we create a better world and bring to Earth the great and long awaited cosmic "seventh day" when all can finally be in real and actual peace and rest. May it be ever so soon.