

This Week In torah *Vayakhel*

Let's talk about Shabbat. I hear a collective groan—again? People may not utter it out loud, but in their heads, some are wondering: “It happens every week, why not focus on something that happens once a year?” Rabbi Neil Gillman z”l would say that if it is repeated more than once, it is really important! In fact, it is referenced over a hundred times in the Torah. The Sabbath was a cornerstone of our religious practice from earliest times. This can be seen from the consistent mention of the Sabbath throughout all the strata of Torah. Sabbath observance is legislated repeatedly in general terms in Genesis, Exodus and Leviticus. Prohibitions are mentioned in 2 different times in Exodus and once in Numbers-- those mentioned include gathering food, plowing and reaping, kindling a fire, and chopping. The positive specifications of Sabbath observance include giving rest to one's servants and animals are mentioned both in Exodus and Deuteronomy. That is right—Shabbat is mentioned in EVERY book of the Torah!

But, why? O the citations here can fill volumes. Yet let me highlight a few. Rabbi Shlomo Noach believed it was paradigm for personal redemption. The Talmud adds to it by saying perfection can be achieved by people observing Shabbat twice in a row with such clarity and precise detail and joy that heaven on earth can be achieved! Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote: “The Sabbath is the day on which we learn the art of surpassing civilization. He who wants to enter the holiness of the day must first lay down the profanity of clattering commerce, of being yoked to toil.” Heschel describes the Sabbath as a “palace in time,” whose architecture is built through a combination of intentional abstentions (refraining from business dealings, long-distance travel, etc.) and acts of prayer, study, joyous meals, and interaction with loved ones.

Notice what happens in this week's *parasha*. First the laws of Shabbat are given, then Betzelel and Ohaliab show up with a “*chacham lev*” [a wise/discerning heart] to build the *Mishkan*. BAM! The laws are the blueprint, it takes the human hand to make it real! Rabbi Jonathan Slater calls Shabbat a gift—and he is right. It is a tool to transcend the mundane and enter a higher level of spirituality. Thru Shabbat observances, we are emancipated from the burden of being and can truly be alive. It is so essential for our spiritual well-being, Torah talks about quite often—more so than any other holy time.

And that requires artistry! Like Betzelel and Ohaliab, we each can craft a beautiful *mishkan* within our souls that reflects the majesty of God and profound faithfulness to the Holy One's presence. Rituals and practices, worship and fellowship, and encouraged behavior and established limitations—these guide us to find a new appreciation. And unlike an edifice made of stone, ours has a sense of fluidity to reform and reestablish itself as our world and circumstances change. But—one thing must not change: Shabbat must happen! And it happens over and over again every week. The challenge before each of us is what are we going to do to make Shabbat real.

Remember Shabbat is not just Friday night; nor is it just Saturday morning. It is a day long adventure of enriching the soul. It culminates with *Havdallah* that marks the Sabbath's end—but with a yearning that it pours into the week ahead.

Now... be an artist! Craft your own Shabbat ritual.