

Vayakhel-Pekudei, 'Seudah Shlishit Shiur' from Rabbi Dr. Zev Wiener

While the vast majority of the laws of Shabbat are not actually written explicitly in the Torah (see Talmud Chagiga 10), the Torah anomalously singles out one particular prohibited labor in Parashat Vayakhel: "Lo Teva'aru Eish BChol Moshvoteychem B'Yom HaShabbat" -- do not kindle fires anywhere in your dwellings on the Sabbath Day. Of all the prohibitions on Shabbat, why is kindling a fire specifically singled out? And what specifically is alluded to by the extra modifier of "in *all* your dwellings?"

The Kabbalistic tradition teaches that in this verse, the Torah not only prohibits lighting physical fires on Shabbat, but also allegorically outlaws lighting internal emotional fires -- namely, one should make every effort to not feel anger, anguish, jealousy, or any other inner conflagration that could disrupt the placidity of this most sublime of days. Indeed, we find a very similar concept in the weekly Shabbat insertion in Birkat HaMazon, "Retzei V'Hachalitzenu," in which we beseech the Almighty "SheLo Tehay Tzarah V'Yagon V'Anacha B'Yom Menuchateinu" -- may we feel no pain, anguish, or anxiety on our Shabbat (see Beit Yosef, OC 306).

While observing the "outer" Shabbat of action is critical, the highest fulfillment of Shabbat comes from additionally observing the "inner" Shabbat of emotion; attaining a sense of impregnable tranquility, transcendence, and joy -- or as our Sages call it, a "Menucha Shleima" -- complete rest. Put every concern out of your mind, and rather enjoy a taste of true freedom, "Zecher L'Yetziat Mitzrayim," in which you savor every breath, every bite, and every step as an end unto itself. Immerse into a day of meditative gratitude, in which you are acutely and constantly aware of the loving presence and guidance of the Almighty in every second of your life and all of His blessings.

Few people in society at large know what it means to truly rest. Even after spending thousands of dollars to get away on vacation, most people will experience frustrations, anxieties, and disappointments at various points of their trip that belie any sense of true rest. But for a pious Jew, every single Shabbat offers an infinitely more powerful and revitalizing rest. In entering a state of "Lo Teva'aru Eish," we leave behind the world we know, and enter an entirely new world "Me'ein Olam HaBa" -- resemblant of the World to Come -- in which we dress differently, speak differently, eat differently, and utterly refuse to allow anything to upset us mentally. Things that normally seem like a big deal during the week simply don't matter anymore when you are in the World to Come.

There are stories of Jews throughout the millennia who suffered immensely in their personal lives, but survived by pacing themselves from Shabbat to Shabbat. Their odyssey through the dark and frigid forests of life became bearable with the rest cottages of Shabbat punctuating the journey -- "I just need to make it until the next Shabbat." Each time Shabbat rolled around, they literally transformed into different people, enjoying a 25 hour reprieve from their pain, replaced by chicken soup, cholent, heartfelt singing, and an unending feeling of Divine love.

Maintaining a state of pure tranquility throughout all times of life is unrealistic and actually undesirable; but achieving it for one day a week, after anticipating and mentally preparing for it during the six previous days of the week -- is far more achievable for most people (obviously there may r"l be circumstances where an individual does not feel capable of this, and this should never be a source of guilt). And fascinatingly, the more one manages to truly rest on Shabbat, the more one will find its effects illuminate the six remaining days of the week, as Shabbat is deemed the "Mekor HaBeracha" -- the source of all blessing.

The current fears of pandemics, isolation, and economic instability have understandably precipitated a great deal of unrest and "internal fire" throughout all segments of the population. Feeling incapable of actively changing the situation, many succumb to futile ruminations while lying awake in bed all night. Others resort to drugs and alcohol as an escape from these issues, only to find the initial problems compounded when they sober back to reality. One of the greatest anchors that the Jew has to cope with the vicissitudes of life is the gift of Shabbat. Preparation and anticipation is important in life; even worry has its place on occasion. But for one day a week, we stop planning, strategizing, figuring out solutions (barring anything, of course, that could potentially save a life), burning with anger, frustration, or worry -- and we leave that world behind to live an existence in which everything is simply as it should be, "K'ilu Kol Melachtecha Asuya" -- "as if all your work is done." By doing so, our actions and mindstate testifies that salvation and success ultimately come not from our brilliance, our strength, or our efforts, but rather from Above. And then, when Saturday night rolls around, we sober back to "reality" with a renewed sense of hope, love, and confidence in His omnipotent ability to help us overcome and cope with whatever challenges lie ahead. In this time of uncertainty and change, let us cling to the stability of Shabbat, the true terra firma of the world that has remained constant and unchanged since the beginning of time; and may our elevated adherence to the Mekor HaBracha bring blessing and healing to all of G-d's children speedily.