

Ki Tisa

Ex. 31:13-17

אַתָּה דִּבֶּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אֶךָ אַת-שְׁבַתְתִּי תִּשְׁמַרְךָ כִּי אָז הוּא בֵּין
וּבֵיןיכֶם לְדַרְתֵיכֶם לְדַעַת כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה מֶקְדְּשָׁכֶם:

וְשִׁמְרָתְךָ אַת-הַשְׁבָת כִּי קָדֵשׁ הוּא לְכֶם מִחְלָלֶיהָ מוֹת יוֹמָת כִּי כָל-הַעֲשָׂה בָּה
מֶלֶאכָה וּגְכֻרָתָה הַנְּפָשָׁת הַהְוָא מִקְרָב עַמִּיךָ:

שְׁשַׁת יְמִים יַעֲשֶׂה מֶלֶאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְׁבִיעִי שְׁבָת שְׁבָתוֹן קָדֵשׁ לִיהוָה כָל-הַעֲשָׂה
מֶלֶאכָה בַּיּוֹם הַשְׁבָת מוֹת יוֹמָת:

וְשִׁמְרָו בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אַת-הַשְׁבָת לְעֵשֹׂות אַת-הַשְׁבָת לְדַרְתְּכֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם:

בֵּין כָּי וּבֵין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָז הוּא לְעוֹלָם כִּי-שְׁשַׁת יְמִים עֲשָׂה יְהוָה אַת-הַשְׁמִינִים
וְאַת-הָאָרֶץ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְׁבִיעִי שְׁבָת וִינְפְשָׁת:

Speak to the Israelite people and say: Nevertheless, you must keep My sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout the ages, that you may know that I the LORD have consecrated you. You shall keep the sabbath, 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. Six days may work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does work on the sabbath day shall be put to death. The Israelite people shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath 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.

How does this text speak to us today, in the light of enforced “down time?” Does this moment’s experience feel like Shabbat? Will the rest of the week? How can we differentiate between *kodesh* and *hol* when out of our normal routine, forced to slow down, stay put, refrain from “going to work?”

Ki Tisa

Pandemic

Lynn Ungar, Unitarian Universalist minister

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?

Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.

Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.

Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.

Center down.
And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.

Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.

(You could hardly deny it now.)

Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.

Reach out your heart.

Reach out your words.

Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love—
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.

Ki Tisa

Chassidic Commentary from *Itturei Torah*, excerpted with notes by Rabbi Jonathan Slater:

Shabbat is central to Jewish life and thought and it certainly holds a special place in this parashah. These are only a few of the many lessons on Shabbat in *Itturei Torah*. The theme we can follow here, however, is that of what it takes to make Shabbat special, and how the special nature of Shabbat changes our experience of our lives. We end with R. Simcha Bunem and his student the Kotzker offering completely different perspectives – what may be more variety of interpretation than contradiction, which carries through the rest of the texts as well. That is, is it the whole week that we spend in anticipation of Shabbat, or only Wednesday, Thursday and Friday? Is Shabbat made more special by adding onto it, or in simply bringing our whole intention to observing it? Is there room for – or, alternatively, isn't Shabbat meant for – our delight in body as well as soul, or is it a day wholly devoted to holiness and Godliness? The either/or sorts of questions seem to fall away as we engage in the experience of Shabbat. No week is like another, no preparation can bring back a particular experience. It is a harvest of what we invest, one enriched by the previous growths turned under week after week, building a reservoir of experience and anticipation.

- Regarding **יֹם טוֹב/yom tov** the sages teach (Betza 15b): Divide it: half of it for God, and half of it for yourselves.
[R. Eliezer is consistent with his own view, for he said: "Rejoicing on the Festival is optional. For it was taught: R. Eliezer says: On a Festival a man has nothing to do save either eat and drink or sit and learn." R. Joshua says:] "Divide it: half of it for God, and half of it for yourselves." [R. Yohanan said: "Both drew their inference from the same verses. One verse states: 'A solemn assembly to YHVH your God' (Deut. 16:8) and another verse reads: 'You shall have a solemn assembly' (Num. 29:35). How is this to be reconciled? R. Eliezer is of the opinion: Either the whole of it is for God or the whole of it is for

Ki Tisa

yourselves; while R. Yehoshua is of the opinion: Divide it; half of it is for God and half of it is for yourselves.]

But, regarding Shabbat, we read “**It is holy for you** (**יכם/lakhem**).” Even that which is yours (*lakhem*) is to be holy – even your eating and drinking to sustain your physical self shall be holy.

--**Kedushat Levi** R. Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev (1740-1810) was a student of the Magid of Mezritch, and a leading teacher and proponent of the nascent Hasidic movement. *Kedushat Levi* is the Torah commentary based on his teachings.

- “You shall keep (*veshamru*)” – the sense of this “keeping” is related to the verse: “**his father kept the matter in mind** (**אביו שמר**) (*את הדבר/ve-aviv shamar et hadavar*)” (Gen. 37:11). He waited and looked forward to when the matter would come to pass. This is how we should relate to Shabbat as well: we should wait for it, yearning for it, like a special and important guest. The whole week should carry the tension of anticipation of the Shabbat to come.

-- **Or Hachayim**, Torah commentary of R. Chayim ben Attar (1696-1743), of Morocco. He taught in Algiers, Italy, Acco and Jerusalem, where he settled and died. Many stories are told of his holiness and greatness, and of the repeated unsuccessful attempts by the Baal Shem Tov to reach the Holy Land and meet with him in the belief that together they could bring the Messiah and the final redemption.

- R. Shim'on b. Lakish said: On *erev Sabbath* the blessed Holy One gives us an extra soul and at the close of the Sabbath God withdraws it from us, for it says: “God ceased from work and was refreshed (*שבת וינפש/shavat vayinaphash*)”: once it has ceased (*שבת/shavat*) woe that the soul is lost (*בדה נפש/vai avdah naphesh*). (Betza 16a)

Ki Tisa

-- R. Menachem Mendel Morgenstern of Kotzk (1787-1859) was the leading student of R. Simcha Bunem of Przysucha, as well as the Hozeh of Lublin and the Yehudi haKadosh of Przysucha.

R. Menachem Mendel of Kotzk explained why the Torah seems to suggest that it was at the start of Shabbat, and not its close, that God was refreshed (*vayinaphash*/וַיָּנֶפֶשׁ): it is to teach that at the start of Shabbat we are aroused to *teshuva*/תְּשׁוּבָה, and when we look back on the week that has passed without improving ourselves, we cry out: “woe to the loss of that soul.” Yet, R. Simcha Bunem of Przysucha taught: when once we have had a chance to cease from work (*keivan sheshavat*/כִּיּוֹן שְׁשָׁבָת), our souls lose their sense of “woe (‘*vai*).” --Rabbi Jonathan Slater

Taking It Into Your Life:

- You might wish to bring your experience of mindfulness meditation into your experience of Shabbat. That is, we often suggest that the moment-to-moment return to the breath, the relief that arises in just **being** (rather than doing), is like a Shabbat... In the midst of what is “doing” for many of us, might it be possible to bring the awareness of acceptance, non-judgment, ease and openness that we know from meditation? Might this be a way to transform our *lakhem* – whatever it is that we are doing – into something holy, devoted to God and elevated in us?
- Is Shabbat for you a relief or an inspiration? Does it remind you of how much farther you have to go, or invite you just to be?