

## JOSEPH'S SHABBOS

*Shabbos is a foretaste of Moshiach. While all the patriarchs kept Shabbos before the mitzvah was given at Sinai, Joseph's observance was unique. His preparations invested Shabbos into the world. Similarly, we must prepare the world for "the day that is all Shabbos," the time of Redemption.*

Shabbos is compared to the World to Come. Many prayers acknowledge that observance of Shabbos gives us a foretaste of the era of Redemption. For instance, in the *Birkas Hamazon* – the blessing after a meal – the following sentence is added on Shabbos: "May the Merciful One let us inherit that day which will be all Shabbos and rest for life everlasting." The *Minchah*, or afternoon prayer, of Shabbos describes Shabbos in words used about the days of Moshiach: "a day of rest and holiness You have given your people . . . a rest of love and generosity, a rest of truth and faithfulness, a rest of peace, serenity and security, a perfect rest with which You find favor." Finally, perhaps the most famous Shabbos prayer, *Lecho Dodi*, sung Friday nights to welcome in the Shabbos, is a poem about the coming of Moshiach and the Redemption, containing verses such as, "To the right and to the left you shall spread out, and the Lord you shall extol. And we shall rejoice and exult through the man who is a descendent of Peretz," that is Moshiach.

Indeed, so closely bound are Shabbos and Moshiach that our sages declare, "If Israel were to observe properly the Shabbos twice, they would immediately be redeemed." Other sources say this prescription for Redemption applies even if the Jewish people observe Shabbos properly only once, being careful about the laws and its details just one time. Observance of Shabbos even once suffices to bring Moshiach immediately.

We may well ask, why does Shabbos, of all the mitzvos in the Torah, have such a special relationship with Moshiach? Why doesn't observing any of the other commandments, such as keeping kosher or eating matzoh or giving *tzedekah*, also result in an *immediate* Redemption? True, every mitzvah contributes to the coming of Moshiach, as the children's song says, "with every mitzvah we do, we add a brick to the Third Temple." Equally true, as Maimonides says, that our next thought, word or deed may be the act that tips the scale to the side of merit and ushers in the Redemption. Nevertheless, the only act guaranteed to bring Moshiach immediately and instantaneously is a universal observance of Shabbos.

A Midrash – a rabbinic insight – on one of the verses of this week's Torah reading, *Mikeitz*, alludes to the unique nature of Shabbos. (As an aside, it may be mentioned that even the name of the portion hints at the Redemption, for the word "*mikeitz*" means "at the end.")

When a Jew hears the words “at the end,” he automatically thinks of the “end” of exile and the beginning of Redemption.)

In this week’s portion, Joseph, in anticipation of a meal with his brothers, tells his chief servant to slaughter an animal for the feast and to “prepare” it. The particular word used for “prepare,” the Midrash notes, is associated with Shabbos observance. One who “prepares” is preparing – during the six days of the week – for Shabbos. Use of specifically this word tells us, according to the Midrash, that Joseph observed the Shabbos before it was given.

Obviously this doesn’t mean that Joseph didn’t keep any of the other commandments, or that his brothers didn’t even keep Shabbos. Commentaries agree that all twelve sons of Jacob kept the mitzvos of the Torah, in accordance with G-d’s statement about Abraham that “I have known him, in order he should command his children and his household after him.” Rather, since the specific allusion is only to Joseph’s observance of Shabbos, it means there is something distinctive about Joseph and about his Shabbos observance.

But if the Midrash wants to tell us that Joseph’s Shabbos observance was unique, why does it do so obliquely, deriving the insight from the use of the word “prepare”? Also, why does the Midrash emphasize that Joseph kept the Shabbos before it was given? Such a conclusion seems obvious, since Joseph lived three generations before Moses.

In order for something to be given, it must already exist. “Giving” means taking something from one place to another, transferring ownership or possession from one person to the next. In our context, this means that already at the time of Joseph, Shabbos existed. It had just not yet been given to the Jewish people. Therefore, the Midrash emphasizes not only Joseph and Shabbos, but also that Joseph kept the Shabbos before it was given.

At the time of creation, Shabbos was designated as a unique and holy day, as it says, “G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on it He rested from all His work.” At the time of the Exodus, G-d gave Shabbos to the Jews, commanding them to “remember and observe” all its commandments.

Shabbos, then, is different than all the other mitzvos. The other mitzvos came into existence at Sinai, at the giving of the Torah. When Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons kept the commandments before the Torah was given, they did so according to their own, human, capacity. However, Shabbos as a day of Divine rest came into existence at the time of creation. But implanting that level of spirituality into the world had to wait until the revelation at Sinai, when Shabbos was given to the Jews.

That G-d rested on Shabbos and then gave it to the Jewish people at Sinai means that human beings, by themselves, cannot create Shabbos. The principle of Shabbos – and all the details

that give it substance and reality – belongs to G-d alone. At Sinai, G-d implanted Shabbos into the Jewish people. They became the mitzvah, so to speak.

Although Joseph's brothers, like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob kept the mitzvos before the Torah was given, they couldn't take the principle of Shabbos – total awareness of G-dliness – and invest it into the physical world. They could only act symbolically, because Shabbos, like the rest of Torah, had not yet been given.

Joseph, on the other hand, did implant Shabbos into the world, which is why his observance of – his preparation for – Shabbos is alluded to in the Torah. Joseph's brothers were shepherds, leading a life of contemplation, isolated from the world. They were aloof from and had no influence on the mundane. Joseph, on the other hand, lived in Egypt, the most dissolute and materialistic of nations. Nor was Joseph an ordinary citizen; he was the viceroy, second to the king, and as a result deeply involved in all the affairs of state, with little time to devote to his personal spiritual growth. Nevertheless, since, as the Torah states, "G-d was with Joseph," he was able to observe Shabbos as G-d wanted, even before Sinai, in a manner of complete tranquility, spiritual as well as physical.

We can now explain why Joseph's Shabbos observance is alluded to with the word "prepare." Shabbos itself, on which an individual ceases all creative labor, changes the person. The rest transforms him, physically and spiritually. The actions we take during the week to prepare for Shabbos, on the other hand, affect the world. The very act of preparation transforms the world, elevating it to a connection with the holiness of Shabbos. And this effect, this elevation, is carried over into Shabbos itself, for the Shabbos meals must be prepared beforehand.

This brings us back to Shabbos and Moshiach. Just as we must get ready for Shabbos by transforming the world, utilizing its resources to prepare our Shabbos meals, so too we must get ready for Moshiach by transforming the world, preparing it for the coming Redemption. Now that we stand after Sinai, when the principle of Shabbos has penetrated every Jew, we need only prepare the world to greet Moshiach.

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