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Unprecedented Preparation

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Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation while maintaining its clarity. However, as in all translations, inadvertent errors may occur.

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1.

SUPERIOR SHABBOS OBSERVANCE

The verse says,¹ “Yosef saw... and he told the one in charge of his house: ‘...and have meat slaughtered and *prepare*.’”² The midrash expounds:³ “*Prepare* — the verb ‘prepare’ surely denotes {preparation for} Shabbos, as it says,⁴ ‘It shall be on the sixth day {Friday}, they shall *prepare*.’ This word implies that Yosef observed Shabbos before it was given.”

A simple reading of the midrash might lead to a mistaken impression that the point of the exposition is to set Yosef apart from his brothers and his observance of Shabbos from his observance of other mitzvos. In other words, **Yosef** observed Shabbos, but his brothers did not, and he observed Shabbos but not the other mitzvos.

{But this cannot be the point of the midrashic exposition because:} Our Sages remark⁵ that the Patriarchs observed all the mitzvos, although they were not commanded to. Scripture says regarding Avraham:⁶ “Because he will instruct his children and his household after him {that they keep the way of Hashem}.” Certainly, Yaakov would also “instruct his children” — all his sons.⁷ Indeed, Rashi **explicitly** writes (in his Gemara commentary):⁸ “**The sons of Yaakov** kept the mitzvos. Even though the Torah had not yet been given, they had received Torah from their forebears.”

Therefore, the midrash doesn’t mean to say that Yosef did **not** observe other mitzvos or that his brothers did **not** observe the mitzvah of Shabbos (and other mitzvos). Instead, the midrash wants to emphasize that Yosef’s Shabbos observance is inferred from this verse

¹ *Bereishis* 43:16.

² {The context of this verse: When Yosef’s brothers brought Binyamin to Egypt, Yosef arranged to share a repast with his brothers.}

³ *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 92, sec. 4, and the sources cited there.

⁴ *Shemos* 16:5.

⁵ *Yoma* 28b; Mishnah at the end of tractate *Kiddushin*; Rashi on *Bereishis* 26:5 (based on *tBereishis Rabbah*, ch. 64, sec. 4) regarding Avraham; Rashi on *Bereishis* 26:12, 27:3,9 (regarding Yitzchok); *Bereishis* 32:5 (regarding Yaakov); see *Vayikra Rabbah*, ch. 2, sec. 10.

⁶ *Bereishis* 18:19.

⁷ See a detailed discussion in beg. of *Parashas Derachim* (discourses 1 and 2), (beg. of) *Beis HaOtzar*, **and sources cited there** — whether the observance of the commandments by the Patriarchs and Yaakov’s sons was only as a self-imposed **stringency**, or whether their status (had changed) also allowing them **leniencies**, because they left the category of Noahides and their legal status became as that of a Jewish person. For a discussion of this topic from a *pshat* perspective — see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 5 pp. 143 onwards, and 266 et passim. See also references cited there and additional sources. {The author of *Parashas Derachim* was Rabbi Yehuda Rosanes (1657–1727), a prominent rabbi and Torah scholar who served as the Chief Rabbi of Constantinople (Istanbul). Rabbi Rosanes is also well known for his other work, *Mishneh Lamelech*, a significant commentary on Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah*.}

⁸ *Chullin* 91a, Rashi, s.v., “*parah lahen*” — explaining **this** verse (“and have meat slaughtered”).

(“surely denotes”), whereas Yosef’s observance of other mitzvos and the brothers’ observance of Shabbos (and other mitzvos) is not referred to in Scripture explicitly.⁹

The above idea, emphasizing the virtue of Yosef’s Shabbos observance, is also expounded elsewhere in Midrash:¹⁰

*Who preceded Me, that I should pay him?*¹¹ — this refers to Yosef, who observed Shabbos before the obligation to observe Shabbos was issued. {As the verse says} “and have meat slaughtered and *prepare*.” Rabbi Yochanan stated that this was said on Friday, and “prepare” unquestionably denotes {preparation} for Shabbos, as it says: “It shall be on the sixth day, they shall *prepare*....”

(The midrash then concludes:)

The Holy One said: “Yosef, you observed Shabbos before the Torah was given; I promise that I will reward your grandson, as he will offer his sacrifice {for his tribe} on Shabbos.”¹²

This midrash implies (in continuation of the above discussion) that Yosef’s Shabbos observance was singled out not only because of its explicit scriptural allusion but also because Yosef’s Shabbos observance was superior to his observance of other mitzvos and superior to his brothers’ observance of the mitzvos. Yosef’s Shabbos observance was so superb that, as a result, **specifically**, Yosef’s grandson merited a special reward for Yosef’s Shabbos observance. In fact, this is why Yosef’s Shabbos observance is explicitly referred to in the verse.

We need to clarify: In what way was Yosef’s Shabbos observance superior to that of his brothers? And how is this superiority hinted at in the words, “and have meat slaughtered and *prepare*”?

⁹ See *Chullin* 91a.

¹⁰ *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 14, (end of) sec. 2.

¹¹ *Iyov* 41:3.

¹² {See *Bamidbar* 7:48.}

2.

WHY SO INDIRECT

Additionally, we need to understand how the exposition, “‘prepare’ surely denotes {preparation for} Shabbos,” proves that Yosef observed Shabbos:

The straightforward understanding is that since Yosef instructed his servants to **prepare** the Shabbos meals before Shabbos, this demonstrates that they could not perform these tasks — such as cooking, etc. — on Shabbos itself.

However, on this basis, further clarification is needed: Why does the midrash deduce circuitously that Yosef observed Shabbos, arguing that since he prepared for Shabbos on Friday, it must have been because, on Shabbos, he could not prepare or do any work? The Torah could have told us straightforwardly that Yosef kept Shabbos along the lines of the *Mechilta*.¹³

The *Mechilta*,¹⁴ indeed, states this explicitly: From the fact that Yosef prepared on Friday, we learn that he observed the command,¹⁵ “**Remember** the Shabbos day.” In this context, **preparation** is relevant only on the Friday before Shabbos (on a weekday).

[As the *Mechilta*¹⁶ says: From the verse, “Remember the Shabbos day,” we learn, “You should remember it on Sunday so if some delectable food comes your way, you should {keep it and} prepare it for Shabbos.”]

3.

BEFORE IT WAS GIVEN

This matter will be clarified by explaining why the midrash adds and emphasizes that Yosef observed Shabbos “before it was given.” As *Yefei Toar*¹⁷ puts it, this raises the question: “What does this phrase teach us? After all, obviously, in Yosef’s days, the Torah had not yet been given.”

¹³ *Mechilta* on *Shemos* 16:5.

¹⁴ *Mechilta*, *ibid.*; *Tanna Devei Eliyahu Rabbah*, ch. 24 (26).

¹⁵ *Shemos* 20:8.

¹⁶ *Mechilta* on *Shemos* 20:8; Rashi, *ad. loc.*; see *Beitzah* 16a; *Ramban* on *Shemos* 20:8; the commentaries on Rashi, *ad. loc.*; Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 242, par. 10.

¹⁷ {*Yefei Toar* is a commentary on Midrash authored by Rabbi Shmuel Yaffe Ashkenazi (1525–1595).}

The *Yefei Toar* answers: “Perhaps the novelty is that Yosef was seemingly prohibited from observing Shabbos since the mitzvah had not yet been given, and {technically,} as a gentile, Yosef was not allowed to keep Shabbos on account of the law that a gentile who observes Shabbos is liable for death.”¹⁸ (This is based on the verse that Hashem conveyed before *Matan Torah*:¹⁹ “They shall not rest.”)²⁰ “Therefore, Scripture informs us that, nonetheless, Yosef observed Shabbos.”

However, on this basis, the emphasis should not be on the fact that the mitzvah of Shabbos had **not** been given yet but on the fact that it was given (later) to the Jewish people specifically. This concept that a gentile who observes Shabbos is liable for death did not apply only before *Matan Torah*; it also applies after.²¹ Thus, the midrash should have used more appropriate wording, such as “Yosef observed Shabbos, which was given only to the Jewish people,” or something to that effect.

Perhaps the explanation is as follows: The word “given”²² implies that what is given already exists. Giving only causes the item to be transferred from one place or domain to another.²³

Our Sages emphasize the terms “before it was given” and “before it being given” regarding Shabbos, so we must presume that Shabbos existed beforehand and then was given.

4.

REASONS FOR SHABBOS

The explanation is as follows:

Among the reasons for the mitzvah of Shabbos (remembering Shabbos,²⁴ observing Shabbos,²⁵ etc.), the Torah says,²⁶ “For in six days, Hashem made the heavens and the earth... and He rested on the seventh day,” and, “On the seventh day, He rested and was refreshed.”

¹⁸ *Sanhedrin* 58b.

¹⁹ {*Matan Torah* is the Giving of the Torah to Jewish people at Mt. Sinai.}

²⁰ *Bereishis* 8:22.

²¹ In fact, in light of the phrases, “before it was given,” and, “it was given,” it stands to reason that the prohibition for gentiles to observe Shabbos did not apply at that time, since the mitzvah of Shabbos had not yet been given. See beg. of *Beis HaOtzar*.

²² And not, “before it was said,” or, “before they were commanded regarding it,” or a similar phrase.

²³ See an extensive discussion of this concept in *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 33, *parshas Naso* (5742), toward the end.

²⁴ *Shemos* 20:8.

²⁵ *Shemos* 31:17 ff.

²⁶ *Shemos* 20:11, *Shemos* 31:17.

This suggests that from the time of Creation, the seventh day was already distinguished from the other weekdays. As the Torah records at the beginning of Creation in *parshas Bereishis*:²⁷ “He rested on the seventh day from all His work... Hashem blessed and sanctified the seventh day, for He rested from all His work.” However, the **commandment** to observe Shabbos was conveyed to the **Jewish people** only after their exodus from Egypt — at *Matan Torah*, and before that at {their encampment at} Marah (after the Exodus).

[Rambam explains in *Guide for the Perplexed*²⁸ that there are two reasons for the mitzvah of Shabbos. In the first set of Ten Commandments, it says, “For in six days...,” and in {the second set, in} *Devarim*, it says,²⁹ “You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt... therefore, Hashem commanded you...” This repetition is because “there are two alternating causes {for resting}.... The cause identified in the first proof text obligates us to acknowledge the honor and greatness of the day.... However, the reason He gave **us** the laws of Shabbos and commanded **us** to observe them springs from our history as slaves in Egypt.” Put differently: The mitzvah to observe Shabbos is germane **only** to Jewish people (it does not pertain to other nations, even though “they were all created, and came into being, during the creation of the world”).³⁰ The reason and underlying basis for this is rooted in the fact “we were slaves in Egypt when our labor was not contingent on our consent; we could not choose the time to engage in it, nor could we desist.”]

On this basis, we can appreciate how (before *Matan Torah*) the mitzvah of Shabbos differed from other mitzvos: Other mitzvos became mitzvos only at *Matan Torah*. Before then, mitzvos did not exist (as a real “*cheftza*”³¹ or as a mitzvah “*cheftza*”). Before *Matan Torah*, when a person fulfilled mitzvos, the mitzvah consisted of nothing more than a human being’s activity (an act of the *gavra*).³²

In contrast, when it came to Shabbos, the timeframe of the seventh day was already set apart from The Six Days of Creation: “He rested on the seventh day.” In other words, the Shabbos day “entity” already existed before *Matan Torah*, from the time of the Six Days of Creation. However, Hashem did not yet **obligate** the *gavra* (the Jewish people) to observe Shabbos. Accordingly, it did not yet constitute a Divine **mitzvah** object **to the person**.

²⁷ *Bereishis* 2:2,3.

²⁸ Vol. 2, ch. 31.

²⁹ {*Devarim* 5:15.}

³⁰ *Abarbanel*, commenting on *Moreh Nevuchim*.

³¹ {Lit., “object” or “item,” the focus being on the object with which the mitzvah is performed, as opposed to the person performing the mitzvah.}

See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 16, p. 212 ff., and the sources cited there.

³² {Lit., “person”; the focus being on the person performing the mitzvah, as opposed to the object or item with which it is performed.}

[We can now appreciate why the Talmud³³ learns that Shabbos has no nexus with *Bnei Noach* from the verse, “day and night shall not cease,”³⁴ stated in the narrative regarding Noach. This is because the distinctive Shabbos time-entity already existed at that time.]³⁵

5.

IT EXISTED BEFOREHAND

This explains the meaning of the terms used regarding Shabbos: “before it was given” and “prior to it being given.”

Even before the **command** to observe Shabbos was given, Shabbos already existed. Moreover, the **definition** of Shabbos (before and after it was “given”) is inherently the same — a day of rest from work. However, before it was given, Shabbos existed only in a different (higher) **domain** — the domain of the Giver. Shabbos was a special time because **Hashem**, so to speak, rested on that day. The giving of Shabbos transferred it from the domain of the Giver to also exist in the domain of the recipient. In other words, the “resting” reached the higher *gavra* — the Jewish person, down here in this world — so he should also experience its spiritual repose.

Before Hashem — the One who “rested on the seventh day” — “gave” Shabbos, His resting had no nexus with others. In other words, a created being could not bring himself to experience Shabbos in a way similar to the way the Creator experiences it. Thus, it made no sense for a person to rest from work. The “giving” in general and all its details occurred at Matan Torah. For at that time, the decree {separating the and lower realms} was nullified, and “the higher realms descended to the lower realms.”³⁶ And specifically, concerning Shabbos (similar to how circumcision³⁷ became a mitzvah-entity before *Matan Torah*), this occurred beforehand — “He commanded you at Marah”³⁸ — Hashem commanded the *gavra*. At that time, Hashem gave the Jewish people this interval which is the seventh day — the *cheftza* of Shabbos, so that it would be a mitzvah-*cheftza* for them and would affect the Jewish person living here in this world.

³³ *Sanhedrin* 58b.

³⁴ *Bereishis* 8:22.

³⁵ We can posit that for this reason Moshe established Shabbos as a day of rest for the Jewish people (in Egypt) — *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 1, par. 28; ch. 5, par. 18; **and the sources cited there.**

³⁶ *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 12, par. 3; *Midrash Tanchuma, parshas Vaeira*, sec. 15.

³⁷ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 15, p. 213, and the sources cited there.

³⁸ {*Shabbos* 87b.}

6.

YOSEF'S SHABBOS OBSERVANCE

We can posit that the virtue of Yosef's Shabbos observance (relative to that of his brothers) is rooted in the following:

The Patriarchs and Yaakov's sons observed mitzvos before Hashem gave them, but the effect of their mitzvah observance was proportionate to the reach of mortals. Accordingly, their mitzvah observance could not alter the essential makeup and nature of the *cheftza* as it was **created**. The *cheftza* (such as matzah, etc.,) was not set apart by their act from other similar objects (e.g., ordinary flat bread) to become a mitzvah object. The same was true regarding their resting on Shabbos. The brothers resting on Shabbos was merely a **human** act; they could not change the *cheftza* of Shabbos as an interval in time. (Their rest from work was only symbolic of Hashem resting — “For on it, He rested....”)³⁹

This was not the case with Yosef. The Torah explicitly mentions his Shabbos observance, making it a reality within the world (in fact, an **eternal** reality).

We can posit a reason for this, as follows:

Yosef's preeminence over his brothers is well known:⁴⁰ His brothers were shepherds. This vocation enabled them to serve Hashem while secluded and separated from worldly affairs. Therefore, their deeds, including their Shabbos observance, were detached from the world. Their “Shabbos” did not alter the (timeframe of the) world. Yosef's method of serving Hashem, on the other hand, was **within** Egypt, a debased country described as “the nakedness of the land.”⁴¹ But not only did residing in Egypt not impede his service of Hashem, in fact, he ruled over Egypt. Pharoah had declared,⁴² “Without you, no man may lift his **hand** or his **foot** in all of the land of Egypt.” This dominance extended not only over material matters (“he sustained Egypt,”)⁴³ but also in spiritual ones (e.g., Yosef forced them “to be circumcised”).⁴⁴

“**Hashem** was with Yosef”⁴⁵ while Yosef was “below” (in Egypt, and more specifically, {this phrase is associated with his servitude} in the house of his Egyptian master before he

³⁹ {*Bereishis* 2:3.}

⁴⁰ *Sefer Hamaamorim* 5565, p. 192, ff.; *Toras Chaim, parshas Vayechi*, s.v., *Ben Poras Yosef*; *Derech Mitzvosecha*, p. 81a; *Sefer Hamaamorim* 5629, p. 258, ff.; *Hemshech Samech Vav*, p. 315; *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5688, p. 23, ff.; et al.

⁴¹ {An expression based on *Bereishis* 42:12.}

⁴² *Bereishis* 41:44.

⁴³ {*Bereishis* 41:56.}

⁴⁴ *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 91, sec. 5; *Midrash Tanchuma, parshas Mikeitz*, sec. 7; *Rashi on Bereishis* 41:55.

⁴⁵ *Bereishis* 39:2.

became the ruler). Accordingly, he experienced Shabbos and **internalized** it (functioning as a connecting intermediary) in the way Hashem experienced it: “For on it, He rested from all His work.” That is, **for Hashem**, Shabbos was a holy *cheftza*. Therefore, when Yosef observed Shabbos before it was given, his Shabbos resembled the superior quality of Shabbos observance after *Matan Torah*.

7.

SPECIFICALLY, THE PREPARATION ILLUSTRATES THIS POINT

Based on this explanation, we can understand why the Torah publicized Yosef’s Shabbos observance specifically through the expression “and prepare,” which alludes to, as mentioned, the verse, “It shall be on the sixth day, **they shall prepare....**”

The **absence** and cessation of work on Shabbos **day** demonstrate a change in the *gavra*; the **person** rests and desists from work over that day.

However, preparing on Friday for Shabbos **affects** the “worldly” objects {*cheftza*} and time, so that due to the uniqueness of Shabbos, one prepares for it (even beforehand). And this preparation changes the world.

Moreover, we can also posit that Yosef’s preparation has an extended **effect** on Shabbos.

This idea is exemplified in halachah:

The verse, “It shall be on the sixth day, they shall prepare,” teaches us (not only that one must actively prepare for Shabbos, that is, by baking and cooking before Shabbos — this is explicitly stated in the verse,⁴⁶ “Bake what you wish to bake, and cook what you wish to cook.” Rather, this verse teaches us) that “Hashem considers the **Shabbos** meal **special**, and one should designate it (verbally) before Shabbos begins while it is still a weekday.”⁴⁷

The preparation —“they shall prepare what they bring” —illustrates that the **Shabbos** meal is essential.

Therefore, the Torah hints that Yosef observed Shabbos using the expression “prepare.” This is because the virtue of his Shabbos observance was because the **day** became special through him and in him. That is, it was the *cheftza* of “He rested on the seventh day,” expressed in the act of preparation specifically.

⁴⁶ *Shemos* 16:23.

⁴⁷ *Beitzah* 2b, Rashi, s.v., “*veheichinu*”; see *Pesachim*, 47b, Rashi, s.v., “*veheichinu*.”

8.

EXPERIENCING SHABBOS MORE DEEPLY

Before *Matan Torah*, there were two dimensions of Shabbos observance, as discussed above. Similarly and correspondingly, these dimensions exist after *Matan Torah*:

One dimension⁴⁸ of Shabbos reflects its overt and verbal conveyance. This dimension finds expression in a straightforward halachic application — on Shabbos, work stops. However, there is another dimension of Shabbos, which finds expression in “internalized observance” — “**desisting** from speech about mundane matters.”⁴⁹ This means not only refraining from **indulging** in this type of conversation,⁵⁰ but desisting altogether — “not engaging in any idle talk, G-d forbid.”⁵¹ This type of “rest” is prompted by a Jew feeling Hashem’s tranquility. A Jew senses not only Hashem’s rest from creating the physical heavens and earth but {also a more ethereal, spiritual rest, as the Alter Rebbe puts it}, “Just as Hashem rested from the ten **utterances** through which the physical heaven and earth were created.”⁵²

Just as Yosef observed Shabbos in a complete sense before *Matan Torah* by experiencing Hashem’s rest — “for on it, He rested” — the same applies to Shabbos observance after *Matan Torah*. A person who observes Shabbos correctly not only desists from physical deeds and mundane conversations but also experiences, as it were, Hashem’s repose. Ultimately, the person experiences the innermost level of Shabbos. This is expressed in his intentional Shabbos prayer and Torah study, focused on cleaving to the One G-d, as it says,⁵³ “Shabbos for Hashem your L-rd.”

This **immediately** brings the true and complete redemption through our righteous Mashiach. Our Sages say⁵⁴ that if the Jewish people were to observe only two Shabbosos properly (which can happen within the timeframe of **one** Shabbos),⁵⁵ they would be redeemed **immediately**.

From a talk delivered on *Shabbos parshas Metzora*, 5741 (1981)

⁴⁸ For the following discussion, see *Tanya, Kuntres Acharon*, at the end; *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 11, p. 81 ff.

⁴⁹ Wording of the Alter Rebbe in *Kuntres Acharon*, *ibid*.

⁵⁰ Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 307, par. 2.

⁵¹ *Tanya, Kuntres Acharon*, *loc cit*.

⁵² Wording of the Alter Rebbe in *Kuntres Acharon*, *loc cit*.

⁵³ *Shemos* 20:10.

⁵⁴ *Shabbos* 118b; *Jerusalem Talmud (Taanis)*, end of 1:1: “**One** Shabbos observed properly.”

⁵⁵ See *Likkutei Torah* (“*Behar*,” 41a ff.) which explains that the previous quote from the *Jerusalem Talmud* “does not contradict the teaching... (in the *Babylonian Talmud*, cited above) etc., because ‘two Shabbasos’ can also mean one Shabbos” — see there, at length, et al.