

Shabbos: The Eternal Source Of Strength

Shabbos is one of the most enigmatic experiences in Yiddishkeit. Not only can an entire people adhere to such a restrictive Mitzvah, but the Jewish people, through the very difficulty of Shabbos observance, has derived such conviction, faith and love for Hashem, that even under the most torturous conditions, survival has been not only possible, but inevitable. We must give over the entire feeling and essence of Shabbos to our talmidim, so that they can passionately continue this Mesorah.

Shmiras Shabbos is a testimony to Hashem's creation of the world in six days and its completion on the seventh. This testimony was given to us as a gift by Hashem Himself, as a sign of His special relationship with Klal Yisroel. No other nation is even permitted to participate and celebrate on this occasion even though the creation of the world benefited all of mankind. Shabbos shows us just how much Hashem loves and appreciates Klal Yisrael. We have to let our talmidim feel what a special relationship that we have with Hashem!

Every Jew, no matter how big of a Tzaddik, must reinforce within himself the realization that Hashem constantly watching, judging and protecting him every single week. It is in this manner, as a reminder of Hashem's current activity and concern in our world, in addition to His activity at the time that He created the world, that Shabbos is so vital.

We have to teach our talmidim that the restrictions of Shabbos are not there to make our lives harder. The message of Shabbos is driven home by abstaining from the thirty-nine melachos of physical activity that were

performed in the Mishkan. The Mitzvos d'Rabanan also exist as a means of protecting the sanctity of the day.

However, the correlation between refraining from these activities and commemorating Hashem's rest remains ambiguous when examined against the fact that Hashem's rest was anything but physical in nature. The "rest" of the seventh day was a state of completion, not relaxation. Only after His creation was complete did Hashem rest, as we say in the Shabbos Tefillah: "On the seventh day, He arose and sat on His Throne of Glory." Hashem existed as the King and Creator of the entire universe only with the completion of creation. By living in a state of total preparedness and completion on the anniversary of Hashem's day of completion, the Jew indelibly imprints upon his mind and heart the belief that Hashem completed the world on the seventh day. Our talmidim must be taught that the thirty-nine melachos are not restrictive acts on the day of Shabbos, but rather they are constructive acts of preparing and completing them before Shabbos comes. Food to be eaten must be previously harvested and cooked. Garments to be worn must be previously woven and sewn. Even objects needed in one place must be brought there prior to the Shabbos. By emulating Hashem and living in a state of completion, the Jew testifies to the world and to himself the truth of Hashem's creation.

We must also give over the message to our talmidim that Shmiras Shabbos is a means of strengthening our trust in Hashem, which gives us true Menuchas Hanefesh. Rashi tells us that through the act of Shmiras Shabbos we are able to actually feel that the work we have to do is completed. We might toil for six days, but when the

Shabbos candles are lit on Erev Shabbos, we can transform our world into one of peace and tranquility. So great is this inner calm that the Torah tells us a person awaiting execution should not be killed on Shabbos so that he, too, could enjoy the serenity of Shabbos before departing from this world. Despite the fear and anguish that no doubt grip a person on the verge of death, the Shabbos is still able to penetrate his heart and put him ease during his final day on earth. What greater and more powerful feeling is there than knowing that our Father has all of our needs under control!

We also have to let our talmidim realize that they have a unique opportunity for growth on Shabbos. It is in this special state of both physical and mental “rest” that all Jews have the potential to go far beyond their previously conceived spiritual capabilities. The real deterrent to growth on the part of any sincere Jew are the distractions of the mind by the mundane, albeit important, activities of the week. It is only on Shabbos, when no worldly interference is allowed to enter our thoughts, that we are able to expend all our energies on spiritual pursuits. In fact, we actually live the greatest lesson of Bitachon when we stop pursuing our livelihoods on Shabbos. What greater way to demonstrate our belief that all is from Hashem than by abandoning our livelihood for a full day! It’s no wonder that so many Jews anxiously, almost desperately, await the Shabbos, so that they may once again serve Hashem with a joy and vibrancy that could not possibly exist during the rest of the week. This is why Shabbos has been designated as a day for increased Torah learning and spiritual growth.

This point is vividly illustrated by the following story, written by a German poet:

A wealthy Polish landlord would often visit the residents of his buildings to maintain his popularity among his tenants.

One Friday night, he came to the home of a destitute Jewish family, their tattered clothes and meager meal bearing witness to their desperate situation. The official, expecting the mood of Shabbos to be somber at best, was privileged instead to see a family filled with joy and exuberance, befitting the most royal of households.

When he heard the old father, so weak after six days of fruitless labor, sing the Shabbos zemiros with a kind of love and dedication that he had never seen before, he was inspired to offer this old man anything he wanted. In response, the old man paused suddenly from singing his beloved song, Menucha V'Simcha, and asked the landlord if he would straighten out a bent candle that threatened to blow out early and disturb the peace and light of the Shabbos meal.

Within the old man’s grasp was the opportunity to alleviate all of his pain and suffering, but the question of what he was lacking was incomprehensible to him in his world of totality and serenity on Shabbos. The only thing to be rectified was the bent candle that he was forbidden by the laws of Shabbos to move; a bent candle which might disturb his tranquility by burning out too early.

This story demonstrates the extent by which one can feel the serenity of Shabbos. Even as we face hardship and uncertainty during the week, on Shabbos we can experience such completeness that all we can ask for is more Shabbos. Of course, this poet did not know that even asking a non-Jew to fix a bent candle is forbidden by the laws of Shabbos, but the message of the story is still true and one that we must give over to our talmidim: Observing Shabbos has the ability to put us in a unique state of mind that has us feeling that our lives lack absolutely nothing and creates a longing for that feeling to never end.