

Shabbat and internalize our responsibilities to God, Who granted us this freedom.

### 3. Family

If the goal is rest, why specifically on Shabbat? Different people might prefer to rest on different days of the week. In truth, the previous reasons can help answer this question,<sup>6</sup> but there appears to be another answer as well. As we have seen, Shabbat allows us to rest and to recover. At times, people can become so beholden to their work that they may have a lot of money and possessions but remain slaves to their jobs. They have no personal time or time to rest.

Taking a break  
from work  
responsibilities

This is not just a problem for that individual; it also has a negative impact on families. “You shall not perform any labor, you, and your son, and your daughter.” On weekdays, people often do not have sufficient opportunity to sit together with their families and connect with them. This is stated by the Sages in *Tanna deVei Eliyahu* (chap. 1):

Time to connect  
with family

An individual performs labor all six [days] and rests on the seventh, [and] he [thereby] reconnects with his children and family members.

Shabbat causes a person to take a break from the daily grind, and be **together with family**. The entire family rests on Shabbat, and therefore they can converse and share joint experiences. The table is bedecked with a white tablecloth and adorned with Shabbat candles. There is an incredible atmosphere, which gives Shabbat a special power. Shabbat turns the individual and the family into free people. It allows one to take a break from the grind and for the family to connect.

Shabbat doesn't just bring families together; it **facilitates a**

A special radiance

6. The fact that the entire Jewish people rests on one day emphasizes our responsibilities to God, who took us out of Egypt. The fact that this occurs specifically on the seventh day expresses belief in the story of the creation of the world.

**different type of communication** with one's family. The *Midrash (Bereshit Rabba 11:2)* states:

“God blessed the seventh day” (*Bereshit 2:3*); He blessed it with the person's countenance, He sanctified it with the person's countenance. One's countenance is not comparable on all the days of the week to what it is like on Shabbat.

On Shabbat, a **person's face can shine with a special light**, a light of contentment, a light of sanctity. This light allows the family that sits together to connect to each other with great love and a special satisfaction.

To be together for  
real!

This point is of particular significance in our times. Often, people are physically at home but they are not really with their families. They are focused on catching up on work, with their eyes on their cell phones, and do not give their attention to those whom they love. They sit alongside them but are in a different place. Shabbat allows us to not only be near each other, but to actually be together; to connect with each other without being absorbed in whatever disconnects us from the reality of our surroundings.

## 4. Social equality

The rest of slaves  
and animals

A passage in *Parashat Mishpatim (Shemot 23:12)* presents another reason for Shabbat:

Six days you shall perform your activities, and on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey will rest and the son of your maidservant and the stranger will be invigorated.

The verse here specifically emphasizes the rest of the ox, donkey, slave, and stranger. The focus here is on the social dimension: Shabbat serves to attend to the needs of slaves and animals, who are constantly working and need rest. The verses that precede the reference to Shabbat in this passage (*Shemot 23:9–11*) also address social mitzvot:

You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the soul of a stranger, as you were strangers in the land of Egypt. Six years you shall sow your land and gather its produce. But the seventh year you shall leave it fallow and relinquish it, that the poor of your people may eat and their leftovers the beast of the field shall eat. So you shall do to your vineyard, to your olive grove.

The mitzva of *Shemita*, which also has several reasons, is presented here from a social perspective. The verse does not list the prohibited agricultural labors of *Shemita*, only the requirement to declare one's produce ownerless so that the poor and the animals will have what to eat. Before that, the Torah mentions another social commandment, the obligation to care for a stranger. In this context the verse mentions the exodus from Egypt, because one who suffered through slavery in Egypt must be cognizant of others who suffer difficulties. The true freedom of former slaves is expressed through their concern for those less fortunate than they are.<sup>7</sup>

One who was once a slave is sensitive to the suffering of others

Shabbat is also presented in this passage from a social perspective. Shabbat facilitates rest for those who are beholden to other people and do not rest on weekdays. Those who were slaves in Egypt must consider their own slaves and workers and allow them to rest one day a week.

Clearly, it cannot be said that Shabbat is based purely on social considerations. If the point of Shabbat was just to provide a break for workers and animals, it would have sufficed to prohibit agricultural labors,<sup>8</sup> and there certainly would have been no reason to

The social reason is integrated with other reasons

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7. See *Haggadah for Pesach – Shirat Miriam*, pp. 134–135, citing Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik.

8. In fact, in *Parashat Ki Tisa* (*Shemot* 34:21) the mitzva of Shabbat is presented similarly to the presentation in *Parashat Mishpatim*, and there it appears that the prohibited labors are limited to agricultural activities: “Six days you shall perform labor, and on the seventh day you shall rest; **from plowing and from harvest you shall rest.**” Obviously, other passages prohibit the full range of prohibited labors, but it is possible that they are based on other reasons, as clearly indicated in some of the passages.

prohibit household activities, such as Selecting during a meal. The blanket prohibition of even household activities is based upon other considerations.

A close examination of the verses of the Ten Commandments in *Parashat Va'ethanan* (*Devarim* 5:14–15) shows that the social reason for Shabbat is in fact intertwined with the commemoration of the exodus from Egypt:

You shall not perform any labor, you, and your son, and your daughter, and your slave, and your maidservant, and your ox, and your donkey, and all your animals, and your stranger who is within your gates, **so that your slave and your maidservant will rest like you.** You shall remember that **you were a slave** in the land of Egypt, **and the Lord your God took you out from there** with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm; therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to observe the Shabbat day.

Everyone rests  
together

The first reason cited in this passage is the social concern. The Torah emphasizes not only the need to allow slaves to rest, but also the value of equality: Just as you and your children rest (“you, and your son, and your daughter”), so too, your slaves and animals (“and your slave, and your maidservant, and your ox, and your donkey”) must rest, “so that your slave and your maidservant will rest **like you.**” The value of and need for rest is not limited to a particular social class; it applies equally to everyone.

Here too, as in *Parashat Mishpatim*, our concern for others is connected to the fact that we remember **our own servitude in Egypt:** “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt.”<sup>9</sup> In addition, here the verse adds that we must also remember the fact

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9. The value of equality is also based to a large degree on the exodus from Egypt. During the exodus from Egypt, God broke the bonds of our slavery to other people and acquired us as His servants. From that time on, all are equal in their standing before God, and they cannot subjugate each other. The Torah does allow for slavery on weekdays, but on Shabbat God’s mastery is expressed, as all are equal before Him and desist from their work.

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## MEANINGS OF SHABBAT

that **God took us out of Egypt**; “and the Lord your God took you out from there.” As discussed above, this is another reason for Shabbat: God freed us from slavery in Egypt and we rest on Shabbat in order to express our freedom on the one hand and our responsibilities to God on the other.

Thus, the passage in *Parashat Mishpatim* emphasizes primarily the concern for the weaker members of society: Since we were slaves in Egypt, we must remember the suffering of slaves and give them the opportunity to rest. By contrast, in *Parashat Va'ethanan*, the Torah combines two reasons for Shabbat: “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt,” and therefore you should be sensitive to the plight of other people. “And the Lord your God took you out from there,” and therefore you are beholden to Him and His commandments, and as a servant of God you must see to it that all members of His kingdom have the opportunity to rest.

The value of equality in being able to rest on Shabbat is particularly relevant nowadays. There are many countries where people do not work on a particular day, such as Sunday, but they use that time to travel, eat out at restaurants, and engage in other leisure activities. In order to facilitate these activities, other people who work in public transportation or in restaurants have to go to work. Most people rest, but **someone else has to work**. Even if these workers do not work on a different day during the week, their children are home from school on Sundays. The workers may get a personal day off, but it will not allow for family togetherness and bonding. In order for everyone to rest on the same day, a specific day must be established on which no one works.

Rest that does not come at the expense of others