

Disconnecting from the mundane world

Feet on the ground,
head in the
heavens

Shabbat disconnects us from the world, but we are **disconnecting in order to connect**. Firstly, it is important to bear in mind that Shabbat is not the World to Come but rather a microcosm of the World to Come, which is very different. The **Rambam** in *Hilkhot Teshuva* (8:2) describes the World to Come, in which people bask in the Divine Presence without any toil or exertion:

In the World to Come there is no physical body; there are just the souls of the righteous without a body, like the angels . . . This is what the early Sages said (*Kalla Rabbati* 2:3): In the World to Come there is no eating, drinking, or sexual relations, but the

18. One expression of this idea is found in the *Meor VaShemesh* (*Ki Tisa*): “All six days of creation all the creatures were distant from their source, because in creating the world, He limited His Godliness . . . and the world became physical. On all weekdays it is very difficult to rouse oneself and direct oneself to his source. Once Shabbat arrived, the Holy One, blessed be He, brought the sanctity of Shabbat to all the worlds, and all creatures felt the sanctity of Shabbat that they could not feel during all the weekdays because of the world having become physical.”

19. See *Sefat Emet* (*Bereshit* 5654, s.v. *bapasuk*), regarding the bifurcation we experience during the week and the inner unity we experience on Shabbat.

righteous sitting with their crowns on their heads, enjoying the glow of the Divine Presence. It has thus been clarified for you that there is no body there, as there is no eating and drinking, and when they said the righteous sitting, they said it as a metaphor, meaning that the righteous are present there without toil or exertion. So too, when they said their crowns on their heads, it means knowledge, that they will know that because of it they merited to live in the World to Come; [their knowledge] is with them and it is their crown, as Solomon said: “With the crown with which his mother crowned him” (*Shir HaShirim* 3:11)... And what is the meaning of their statement that they are enjoying the glow of the Divine Presence? [It means that they] know and comprehend the truth of the Holy One, blessed be He, which they do not know while in the base, lowly body.

On Shabbat we disconnect from activity in the physical world, but we do eat and drink. The withdrawal is incomplete. On the one hand, this is not as elevated as the World to Come, where there is no body or any other barrier, and the soul cleaves to its Creator: “They know and comprehend the truth of the Holy One, blessed be He.” That level is approximated only on Yom Kippur, when we obviously still have a body but we do not attend to it. On the other hand, Shabbat has an advantage over the World to Come. On Shabbat one has the ability to exist in an elevated reality and to connect that reality to the physical world of eating and drinking.

The mitzva of delighting in Shabbat does not exist only in order to honor Shabbat. It allows one to reach a high level of closeness to God while our heads are in the heavens but our feet tread upon the ground and sanctify it. On Shabbat we are able to connect the highest of heavenly realms with the physical world of eating and drinking.

Consequently, Shabbat is not a day on which there is complete detachment from the physical world. It is a day when there is eating, drinking, and physical pleasure, but at the same time it is a microcosm of the World to Come and allows one to achieve great sanctity.

There is another proof to the fact that Shabbat is not primarily

From the human perspective, Shabbat precedes the weekdays

about rest and relaxation and the fact that it does not represent an absolute break from the mundane world.

Which came first, the six days of creative activity or Shabbat? Ostensibly the six weekdays came first, as God created the world in six days and then rested on the seventh day. But this is true only from the perspective of God and creation. From the human perspective the opposite is true; Adam, the first man, was created on the sixth day, such that Shabbat occurred at the very beginning of his existence,²⁰ before he ever experienced the six weekdays.²¹

This difference of perspective is already noted in the **Gemara** (69b), which cites a dispute concerning one who is traveling in the desert and does not know which day is Shabbat:

Rav Huna said: One who was walking along the way or in the desert and does not know when Shabbat occurs counts six days and then observes one day [as Shabbat]. Ḥiya bar Rav says: He observes one day [as Shabbat] and then he counts six weekdays. With regard to what do they disagree? One Sage held: It is like the creation of the world, and one Sage held: It is like Adam, the first man.

Rav Huna follows the model of the **creation of the world**, and therefore holds that the individual must count six days and then observe Shabbat. Ḥiya bar Rav follows the model of the **creation of Adam**, and therefore holds that the individual should first observe Shabbat and then count six days.²²

20. Adam was not commanded to observe Shabbat, but God's Shabbat descended upon the world immediately after his creation, and Shabbat was certainly created for people, not for God.

21. I heard this point from my father-in-law, **HaRav Blumenzweig**. Later, I saw a similar idea in the *Shem MiShmuel* in the name of his father, as cited below.

22. In addition to these two approaches, there is a third approach presented in kabbalistic works (*Peri Etz Ḥayim*, Gate of Shabbat, chap.1). In that view, Shabbat is the **middle of the week**. On Wednesday, the day when the heavenly lights were created, there is an illumination that is the beginning

Two conclusions may be drawn from this point:

1. Shabbat (at least the first one) was not given to Adam for the purpose of rest, as it was given immediately after his creation, before he had performed any labor.²³
2. From the human perspective, the essence of Shabbat is not to provide a break after six days of work (although this may be one aspect of Shabbat), but rather it is the effect of Shabbat on the six weekdays that follow. Shabbat was given to Adam before the six days of labor, with the hope that after experiencing Shabbat he would act better on the six weekdays. Shabbat provides sanctity that is the source of the six days that follow.²⁴

The two-sided relationship between Shabbat and the days of the week is expressed by the *Shem MiShmuel* (*Beshalah*, 5672, s.v. *vayomer Hashem*) in the name of his father, the Sokhatchover Rebbe, the author of *Avnei Nezer*:

There are two aspects to Shabbat, as my saintly father, the Rebbe of blessed memory, said. It precedes the six days of activity, which receive blessing from it, and it follows the six days of activity. We have already said that **Shabbat follows the days of activity**

of the sanctity of Shabbat. On that day one should think about Shabbat and about observing it in an optimal fashion. This is how some *Rishonim* explain the *Gemara* (19a) that starting from Wednesday one may not begin a sea voyage if it will not conclude by Shabbat; see *Mishna Berura* (introduction to 248) and my book, *Halakha from Its Sources – Army* (vol. 1, pp. 307–311). The sanctity of Shabbat continues to provide illumination until Tuesday, which is why *havdala* may be recited until Tuesday (*Pesahim* 106a).

23. The Sages (*Sanhedrin* 38b) teach that Adam was created in the middle of the sixth day and sinned before Shabbat. Yet, he certainly did not experience six days of labor that would require rest.

24. According to the kabbalists, the “unformed” state of the world before creation was a reality of Shabbat. Consequently, the entire world was created after Shabbat. We are attempting to demonstrate that even according to the straightforward reading of the Torah text, and in our own reality, in a certain sense Shabbat begins the new week.

in correlation to the creation of the world, because “one who toils on the six days of activity eats on Shabbat.” **And Shabbat precedes the six days of activity in correlation to the creation of Adam, the first man**, as for him Shabbat preceded the days of activity, for in God’s kindness to him He granted Adam the sanctity of Shabbat so that he would have the ability to perform his labor on the six days of activity that followed, as stated in the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (38a): Why was Adam created on the eve of Shabbat? In order to enter into a mitzva immediately.

Shabbat provides sanctity for the entire week

Shabbat doesn’t just provide the opportunity to garner physical strength for the upcoming six weekdays. It grants the Jewish people Godly sanctity and allows them to draw from the upper, spiritual world while existing in the human world. The rest of the week will be entirely different, as it will have a sacred source. There is no comparison between the week of one who observes Shabbat and the week of one who does not. The weekdays of one who observes Shabbat are days of activity that stem from a world of sanctity and connectedness to God.²⁵ Not only is the Shabbat different, but the whole week is different; the entirety of life is different, as it is imbued with sanctity.²⁶

There are two aspects to Shabbat: The elevation of the Jewish people to a lofty, elevated level of sanctity, and injecting sanctity into the mundane world. These two effects are mentioned by Rav Kook (*Olat Re’iya*, vol. 2, p. 45):²⁷

25. This is consistent with the statement in the *Zohar* (*Shemot* 63b) that all six days receive blessing via Shabbat.

26. This is also the significance of adding time onto Shabbat; one takes the sanctity of Shabbat and extends it to the weekday (see **Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch** in *Matana Tova – Hegyonot LeYom HaShabbat*, p. 178).

27. Rav Kook speaks about the weekdays drawing sanctity from Shabbat because people remember Shabbat and prepare for it during the week. In this way the weekdays draw not only from the Shabbat preceding them but also from the upcoming Shabbat.

The sanctity of Shabbat has two effects: One is that it sanctifies and elevates the Jewish people with its lofty sanctity; it lifts them by the very sanctity of the day above all mundane matters and attaches them to the upper sanctity and glory. It also provides the energy for all the days of action, with all their mundaneness and lowliness, because when people remember the sanctity of Shabbat, they are elevated.

Shabbat is generally understood as a day of rest that follows the strenuous workweek. In *halakha* there is also significance to the fact that the weekdays precede Shabbat and one prepares for Shabbat on those days. This also facilitates the idea that Shabbat attests to the creation of the world, when there were also six days of creation followed by Shabbat. But the Jewish Shabbat is much greater than that: It is not just the Shabbat of the creation of the world, it is also the Shabbat of Adam, i.e., the Shabbat that precedes the six days of the week. Shabbat is not just the prize at the end of a long week; it is the beginning of the week, and impacts upon the entire week. **Shabbat is what lifts us to the heavens so that we can work during the rest of the week from a place of unique sanctity, great power, and divine morality. Shabbat allows us to reach a state in which our feet are on the ground but they are constantly guided and inspired by a sublime, exalted world.**

This concept can be derived from the Torah passage concerning the manna. The Jewish people did not collect manna on Shabbat, and instead a double portion of manna fell on Friday. At first glance, one might understand this to indicate that on Shabbat there is a total disconnect from the realm of regular human activity, and one is sustained on Shabbat only by his activities during the week.

Yet, a midrash (*Bereshit Rabba* 11:2) presents the exact opposite perspective:

“God blessed the seventh day [and sanctified it]” (*Bereshit* 2:3). Rabbi Yishmael says: He blessed it with the manna and sanctified it with the manna. He **blessed** it with the manna, as on all the days of the week an *omer* [of manna] would fall, and on the eve

The sanctity of Shabbat brings bounty during the week

GATEWAY TO SHABBAT

of Shabbat two *omers* [fell]; He **sanctified** it with the manna, as it did not fall at all on [Shabbat].

According to the midrash, **the sanctity of Shabbat** is expressed by the fact that **manna did not fall**, indicating that we are detached from regular activities and are elevated to a more exalted world in which people do not engage in collecting manna. The **blessing of Shabbat** is expressed in the fact that **a double portion of manna fell on Friday. It is specifically the exalted status and sanctity of Shabbat that brings blessing and bounty on weekdays.** Not that because of our efforts on Friday we have what to eat on Shabbat; rather because of Shabbat we are blessed with bounty on Friday. On a technical level we prepare during the week so that we will have what to eat on Friday, but on a more fundamental level it is quite the opposite, Shabbat is the source of our bounty during the week.²⁸

It is quite fitting that the commandment to observe Shabbat was given in the context of the story of the manna. The manna was “food from the heavens” (*Shemot* 16:4), which corresponds to the exalted, heavenly nature of Shabbat.