YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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UNDERSTANDING THE PRACTICE AND MEANING OF HALAKHA

Shiur #6: Kavod and Oneg (Shabbat part 4)

by Rav Ezra Bick

The two major positive obligations concerning Shabbat are called "kavod" (honor) and "oneg" (delight or pleasure). These two categories are derived from the same verse in Isaiah (58,13-14): "If you turn your foot away from Shabbat, from doing your purpose on my holy day, and CALL SHABBAT A DELIGHT, THE HOLY OF GOD HONORABLE... then you shall delight yourself in God, and I shall mount you on the high places of the earth, and feed you the legacy of Jacob your father, for the mouth of God has spoken."

I

Let us first examine the category of kavod. The Rambam, rather than defining it, lists examples:

What is honor? - This is what the Sages have said, that it is incumbent on one to wash one's face, hands, and feet in hot water before Shabbat because of the honor of Shabbat, and he wraps himself in tzitzit and sits seriously, waiting for to greet the Shabbat, as one who goes out to greet the king. The early Sages would gather their disciples before Shabbat and wrap themselves (in the tallit) and say: Let us go out to greet the Shabbat king.

(Notice that the Rambam has "Shabbat king" in place of the usual version - Shabbat queen.)

The honor of Shabbat includes that one wear a clean garment. The garments of the week should not be the same as that of Shabbat.... It is forbidden to sit down to a feast before Shabbat, because of the honor of Shabbat... One should arrange the table before Shabbat... in order to honor it at its commencement. He must arrange the house... and there should be a candle burning, and the table arranged, and the beds made, for all these are part of the honor of Shabbat.

Even though one may be extremely distinguished, and it is not his habit to shop in the market, or engage in housework, one must do something for the honor of Shabbat personally (lit. - with his body). From amongst the early Sages there were those who split wood for the cooking, and those who cooked, or salted the meat, or twined wicks, or lit the candles, and those who went out to do the shopping for Shabbat, even though it was not their usual habit (Hilkhot Shabbat 30,2-6).

Dressing up for special occasions comes naturally to us, I think, but this is not necessarily the same thing as the "honor" described by the Rambam. A simple example will suffice. Most people I know, who dress very nicely when they go to the synagogue on Shabbat, will not bother if they have to stay home (for instance, if they are sick). I suspect that fine clothing is not really an expression of honor, surely not of honoring the Shabbat. The other examples in the Rambam make this clear. Going shopping, personally cleaning the house, etc. - it is not merely necessary to have a clean house or good foods, it is necessary to engage personally in the preparation. One honors the Shabbat by getting ready for it, by making special efforts in the personal sphere (cleanliness, clothing) to greet it. One final example of the Rambam is especially striking - he should sit and wait for the Shabbat, as one greets a king. (Most of things in the Rambam's list are performed by Shabbat observers; I know precious few, however, who are not running around like madmen five minutes before candle lighting getting ready).

It must be noted that "honor" is not accorded to every significant time or object in Judaism. You do not (halakhically) have to dress up for a wedding, even your own (despite what your mother said). There is no such mitzva for a festival. The two other examples in the halakha of a mitzva of "honor" are regarding parents (not so much to obey, as is often thought, but to "honor your father and mother") and the Torah.

I would like to suggest that the common denominator in these cases is that we RECEIVE from them, even though we are not SUPERIOR to them; i.e., they are not our servants, but we theirs, and nonetheless, we gain immensely by our relationship with them. This is not the honor of a testimonial dinner, but the "kavod" (closer to dignity, or even majesty) of royalty. The point about Shabbat is that it is not something which we DO, like most other mitzvot, but something which we experience. The Torah and the Sages many times speak of Shabbat as a gift - "See that I have given you the Shabbat (Ex. 16:28)," "God said to Moshe: I have a precious gift in my treasury, Shabbat is its name, and I wish to give it to Yisrael (Shabbat 10b)."

We honor the Shabbat to ensure that we not exploit it - the power of Shabbat is that it is rooted in the infinite holiness of God (or, as I explained in the previous shiurim, in the infinite potential of man to reach God). That is the same relationship we have with Torah itself - it belongs to us, we learn it, but it is rooted in infinite value. The Shabbat too is ours, we experience it, but we cannot subjugate it, since its value is rooted in infinite worth, even if we have identified that worth with the infinite potential of ourselves. Hence, on the practical level, we have to show that Shabbat is an honored guest in our homes. Egalitarian democratic society finds it difficult to adopt these expressions of honor. What do they - clothing, cleanliness, candles, order of table, sitting and waiting - show? Why should I look different when Shabbat or a king comes to visit? It shows that we believe that we should be different, that we are raised to a higher level by the visit. The visit of the king ennobles me, and I have to dress as royalty when he comes, for I am now part of his retinue. You have to admit that there are others WHO ARE WORTH MORE THAN YOU - in this case the Shabbat king (or queen), and what's more, that they can add to your worth.

To take a simple example from another case of kavod, a Jew stands up before the Torah, or before a Torah scholar. I assume it is a rare sight to see a class stand up before a professor in an American university, although this is a daily occurrence in yeshivot. What does the gesture mean? It does not express appreciation or thanks, but rather recognition that what you can get from this person is valuable in its own right, and can enrich you. Shabbat, precisely because its value is internal, within the experience of the observer himself, must be "honored," lest we lose sight of the fact that man's creativity is divine, is rooted in the infinite and not in the present limited sum of what he has actually succeeded in doing.

II

The second mitzva is "oneg" - enjoyment, delight. This is even more singular. There is no other case where such a reaction is mandated. "Simcha" (joy) is the mandated reaction to festivals, but halakhically it is questionable if it is part of Shabbat (although it is mentioned in the prayers). Oneg, a mitzva to enjoy ourselves, is found only here. You do not have to enjoy Pesach, or tefillin, or kashrut. It does not say anywhere that Judaism is enjoyable - it surely is not always so. Only Shabbat has a commandment - you must enjoy yourself ("or else!"). Why?

First, let us quickly see what is meant by oneg. The Rambam writes:

What is delight? This is what the Sages said: That one should prepare an especially rich cooked food, and an especially spiced beverage, for Shabbat, each according to his wealth. The more one spends on Shabbat and in preparing the foods is commendable. If he cannot afford it, then even if he prepares only one cooked vegetable or the like in honor of Shabbat, that is oneg Shabbat. He is not obligated to restrict himself or borrow from others in order to increase the foods for Shabbat, as the Sages said: Let your Shabbat be mundane, but do not become dependent on others....

One is obligated to eat three meals on Shabbat... each meal with wine and two loaves.

Eating meat and drinking wine on Shabbat is oneg, if he can afford it. (ibid. 7-10)

I think we should remember the meaning of "commandment." The verse in Isaiah is not saying that Shabbat is a delight. It is saying - you should CALL it a delight. Examine the end of the verse - if you do all the things listed in the first part of the verse, "then you shall delight yourself in God." There is delight in Shabbat, the delight of God, but only if you do something to make it so. What does it mean to delight in Shabbat, and especially to delight in God? Obviously, food is only the external means for inner enjoyment. But why is there a mitzva to have a good time, and why specifically on Shabbat?

The answer I think is found in the reverse side of what we said about kavod. Shabbat is a gift, greater than me, which gives me something for myself. For that reason I honor it. But Shabbat does not give me something new, something from above. It opens me up to experience the boundless depth and height that is within me, that I have spent the week in developing. The halakha calls on us to find the delight in that experience, for otherwise the point will be lost. What is delight? It is the recognition that this boundless depth is in me, that I can experience it, cherish it, be one with it. Think of a child given a sparkling toy, a kaleidoscope. He turns it about, enchanted by its colors, by the new vistas it opens up for him. What is Shabbat, after the days of the week, but the realization of new vistas, new colors, deeper colors, in the everyday experience of being alive. If you only REST on Shabbat, recuperate from a week of toil, you miss out on the inner message - that you, within you, contain the light of creation. One has to open one's eyes to see the obvious. One has to make an effort to ensure that the experience of the infinite is grasped and internalized. The way to do that, paradoxically enough, is not by trying hard, but by enjoyment - by opening oneself to let the experience sparkle and delight us.

Kavod and oneg - cherish, honor, see it as valuable, as a gift, and, at the same time, open your eyes to see its sparkle, how it is part of your experience, and not something to be honored from afar. THEN, "you shall delight yourself in God, and I shall mount you on the high places of the earth, and feed you the legacy of Jacob your father, for the mouth of God has spoken."

No other mitzva has oneg, for all other mitzvot add to man from outside himself. If he enjoys that, good, and if not, also good. Shabbat adds nothing if you do not enjoy it, because it is not new, or rather it is a new dimension to yourself. Its only value is in the recognition that it is there, in the sudden realization how much value resides in the soul of a creative human being. That realization is delight.

III

Our master (R. Yehuda Ha-nasi, the author of the Mishna) made a meal for Antoninus (the Roman emperor) on Shabbat. He served a cold dish, (Antoninus) tasted it, and it was pleasant. (Antoninus) made a meal on a weekday and served a boiling dish. (Antoninus) said: The first was more pleasant to me. (R. Yehuda) said to him: It is missing one spice. (Antoninus) said: Is anything missing from the king's treasury? He said to him: It is missing Shabbat. Do you have Shabbat? (Bereishit Rabba 11,4).

The Sages claim that food tastes better on Shabbat. Why? Because Shabbat is a secret ingredient. What does that mean, if not that even though there is no secret ingredient, no actually additive, it tastes better because it is Shabbat. In other words, the same experience is enhanced because we view it, taste it, experience it, through Shabbat. Shabbat is not a new experience; it is the discovery of the depth of our OLD experiences. And THAT is why it is indeed a totally NEW experience.

There are a series of midrashim which aim to show that Shabbat is not merely an internal experience, but an external, objectively different kind of time. These midrashim are not content with better-tasting food; they draw our gaze to the natural order. For instance:

'God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it....' R. Yishmael said: He blessed it with manna (In the desert, the manna fell every day, with a double portion on Friday, and none on Shabbat).... R. Eliezer said: He blessed it with the candle (light), and it happened to me myself. One time I lit the candle on the Shabbat eve, and came and found it burning at the conclusion of Shabbat, and no oil was missing.... (ibid. 11,2)

(Turnus Rufus, a Roman commander in the Land of Israel) asked R. Akiva: How do you know that God honors the Shabbat? He answered him: The Sambatyon River proves it, as it drags stones all the days of the week and rests on Shabbat... (ibid. 7)

I think these midrashim are emphasizing the kavod side of our equation - without a connection to the infinite creativity of God, we will find nothing on Shabbat. Three or four lectures ago, in what was then the second level of Shabbat, I stressed the idea that we rest so that only God is seen to be truly creative. Shabbat is the day that we draw down deep into the source of our creativity, which is also the unique position of God as sole creator of everything. In order to connect to that inner creativity within, we have to quiet all activity without, even the Sambatyon. But consider the following Chasidic story I once heard from Rav Amital:

Rav Zusha and Rav Elimelech, two Chasidic masters who were brothers, once decided to conduct an experiment to discover if the exaltation of spirit they felt on Shabbat was rooted in their attitude towards it, or in external reality. So they decided to make Shabbat once on a Wednesday. Tuesday afternoon they washed, immersed in the mikva (ritual bath), donned their Shabbat clothes, and welcomed the Shabbat queen. Then they recited kiddush, ate a Shabbat meal, sang the special songs, and spent the day the way that only Chasidic masters know how to spend a Shabbat day.

Ah, so what happened, you want to know. Well, I have heard two endings to this story. One claims that the day was flat, uninspiring, no glitter, no flash. Rav Zusha was disappointed, but Rav Elimelech told him: No, it was our fault. We did not eat your wife's gefilte fish. (In other words, we cannot do it alone). But the ending I like goes like this.

The day was a resounding success. The food was as sweet as ambrosia the angels sang along with them, the depths of holiness surged up and carried them up to the height of heaven. After havdala, Rav Zusha was elated. "You see, Elimelech," he said, "the holiness is in us."

"No," Rav Elimelech answered him, "it only proves that the holiness of Shabbat is so great that you can find its remnants even on Wednesday."

Think about it**.**