

The Specialness and severity of Shabbos

Someone once asked R' Shimshon Pincus zt"l "Is it true that in the Torah it says that someone gathered a few twigs and was killed for it?" So he answered "Yes, it says that in the Torah." He asked "why?" R' Shimshon answered him with a parable:

There were two surgeons who were each performing surgery and both made mistakes. One was a hand surgeon, and he cut his patient's hand 1/10- inch too much. This was a bad mistake, however it can be easily repaired! The other surgeon was a neurosurgeon, who usually works with a microscope. He made a minute mistake of cutting 1/100-inch too much, it is a fatal mistake, and he can sit in jail for it! The reason for such severe disciplinary measures is that he is working in the nerve center! There, there is no room for mistakes- every slight move matters, because of *where* he is working!

Besides for Shabbat, there is another place where we see a lot of stringency; that is in the Bais Hamikdash. In the Bais Hamikdash, for any wrong move, the punishment was מיתה בידי שמים - a heavenly decreed death. A wrong thought by the kohen while doing the service, was מיתה בידי שמים; if the kohen didn't wash his hands beforehand; if his clothes weren't the special garments; if his clothes were too long or too short; if there was a little air in between his skin and the garments; any wrong move was death! Why was it so? Because when it is in the king's presence, then everything is critical, there's no margin for error! This is why any wrong move in the Bais Hamikdash carried such a severe punishment. It was not *what* was done, rather *where* it was done.

The גמרא יבמות 1, compares Shabbat to the Bais Hamikdash¹; regarding that we are to fear the קדושה-sanctity that is in both of these places. We also see in ספר יראים² that the same way that we are commanded to honor and fear the Bais Hamikdash, so too, we must honor and fear the Shabbos, because the Torah compares them to each other. What is it that they both have in common? The presence of Hashem!

Shabbos is like being in the Bais Hamikdash: when Shabbat enters, we are, metaphorically, in the king's throne room. Hashem comes to visit us on Shabbat, and we are in His holy presence, therefore the way we have to act in His is on a higher level.

We can see parallels between the things that were in the Bais Hamikdash, and our conduct on Shabbos.

Some of the similarities are:

1. In the Bais Hamikdash was the ארון הקודש – the holy ark, which represented the Torah, and was also the place where the connection between Hashem and כלל Jews was its strongest. Also, on Shabbat there is an idea of extra learning, as it says לא נתנו³ Shabbat "שבתות אלא ללמוד בהם". We mentioned (Introduction to Shabbat) that Shabbat is when we have a special relationship with Hashem. The reason for this is: if we are in the house of Hashem on Shabbos, then we must talk to him; otherwise, what is the purpose of being in his house? Therefore, talking to Hashem, learning His Torah, are the primary activities of Shabbat.

¹ "נאמרה שמירה בשבת ונאמרה מורא במקדש, מה שמירה האמורה בשבת -לא משבת אתה מתיירא אלא ממי שהזהיר על השבת, אף מורא האמורה במקדש - לא ממקדש אתה מתיירא אלא ממי שהזהיר על המקדש".

² ס' ת"י מורא שבת. כשם שצוה הקב"ה לתת מורא וכיבוד למקדש כך צוה לתת לשבת שהרי הוקשו זה לזה דכתיב את שבתותי תשמורו ומקדשי תיראו ומהו מורא שבת שיחשוב אדם בלבו לכבד את השבת ולשמור ולהיות חרד על הדבר ולא את השבת אתה ירא אלא ממי שהזהיר על השבת.

³ ירושלמי שבת פט"ו ה"ג

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2. In the Bais Hamikdash there was a **מנורה** menorah, so on Shabbat we have the candles. Not only that, but in the Bais Hamikdash there were two mitzvot involved with the menorah; 1) the preparation of the **מנורה**: to clean it out, and set it up. 2) The actual lighting of the **מנורה**. Likewise on Shabbat, we have these two activities: the husband sets up the candles, and then the wife lights them.

3. In the Bais Hamikdash there was a table and offerings-**קרבנות**, so on Shabbat we have a meal. Additionally, in the Bais Hamikdash, on the table were, the 12 special show breads that were baked on Erev Shabbat, and put on the table until the next Shabbat while they were still warm. There is also a minhag to bake challot on erev Shabbat to put on the Shabbat table. Some women have the minhag to either bake the challot from six pieces or to braid them from six strands, so when they put down the two challot on the table it will be comprised of 12 parts paralleling the **לחם הפנים**.

4. On erev Shabbat we must change our clothes. This halacha comes from the verse " **ופשט את בגדיו ולבש בגדים אחרים** ", written about the High priest. On Shabbat, we are like the **כהנים** doing the **עבודה**, so the **פסוק** applies to us, as well.

5. In the Bais Hamikdash, the rule was that no one may enter without first washing their hands and feet. There was a custom, however, that they also went to the Mikvah before hand as an extra preparation. Similarly, on erev Shabbat we wash our hands and feet, like the **כהנים**, and there are those men that go to the Mikvah also.

We do all of these things, because on Shabbat, we are like **כהנים** in the Bais Hamikdash, who were in the presence of Hashem.

Now we can start to appreciate why the punishment for violating Shabbat is so great. It is not because of *what* was done but because we are, at that time, standing in front of the king. I think that can extend the concept further. Hashem made mankind the ruler over the world like it says " **ומלאו את הארץ וכבשה** ". However, Hashem also said, that on Shabbat he wants the ruler-ship back, and commanded us to restrain our creative abilities in manipulating the world (the **מלאכות**). Because on Shabbat, He is the king. When we do melacha, it is as if we're taking the keys of running the universe away from Hashem, which is being **מורד במלכות** - mutiny against the king. Furthermore we're doing it in no less a place than the king's own palace. Because on Shabbat that is where we are metaphorically! Therefore, it emerges that a mechalel Shabbat does the worst sin, mutiny, in the worst place –the king's throne room!

We can now also understand why there are so many mitzvos related to the way we treat Shabbat as we shall see; because when we deal and honor Shabbat we are honoring Hashem himself directly! When we prepare for Shabbat we are preparing our own private Bais Hamikdash for **הקב"ה** and sanctifying His name with our Shabbat meals.