

ANTICIPATING THE SHABBOS

Parshas Vayeitzei

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

Friday, erev Shabbos, occupies a paramount role in the Shulchan Aruch, as the day of preparation, and awaiting the grand sacred day of Shabbos. Three complete chapters deal with the laws governing erev Shabbos, some activities forbidden a few hours before the arrival of Shabbos.

The purpose, it seems, is to get into the right frame of mind, for the sanctity of Shabbos, heart and soul. In discussing the honor of Shabbos, "וכבודתו" (Isaiah 58:13) Maimonides writes "awaiting the Shabbos (a certain period before sunset) as one goes out to meet a king."

The ancestors observed Shabbos before the Torah was given. The first song at the Friday night meal (Kol Mekadaish) refers to Abraham. "Seekers of Hashem, seed of Abraham, His beloved who delay departing from the Shabbos, and rush to enter. While the zemer mentions "seed" of Abraham, it should be assumed that Abraham observed the Shabbos. Since, however, the Torah had not as yet been given, Abraham's Shabbos observance cannot be regarded as fulfilling a Mitzvah. It should therefore be categorized as INTRODUCTORY to Shabbos, a prelude, initiating and experience the gift of Shabbos which will be given later on at Sinai. It is similar to the above erev Shabbos requirement, getting into the taste of Shabbos, טועמיה חיים זכו, getting a taste of the Shabbos spirit beforehand. The words ממהרים

לבא, they rush, speed, early into Shabbos, now has a unique connotation regarding Abraham. It is a reference to the speed even before the law was legislated.

We now gain insight into a fascinating anecdote in our parsha. When Rivka sent off her son Yaakov to her brother Lovon to save him from Esav's wrath, she added "And remain with him a short while, "ימים אחדים", until your brother's anger subsides" (27:44). When he finally reached his destination, he made a deal with Lovon to work for him seven years for the award to marry Rochel. The Torah says the seven years seemed to him as but a few days, כימים אחדים, because of his love for her.

Rashi comments the seven years was the fulfillment of his mother's ימים אחדים, the period his mother advised him to stay with Lovon. The Bnei Yesoschor quoting the מבשר צדיק interprets the words ימים אחדים seven years, ימים means a year, as in ימים תהי' גאולתו (ויקרא כה:כט) the seller of a certain estate privileged to redeem it back up to a year. אחדים is interpreted שבתים, Shabbos being called דאחד, (as in רזא דשבת, recited before Shabbos Maariv, Nusach Sfar). A year (365) of Shabosim (אחד) comprises seven years.

The Tiferes Shlomo of Radomsk explains that Rivka suggested to Yaakov to observe Shabbos, for seven years, which will be a source of watchfulness and protection against the anger of Esav.

According to the above, interestingly, the known fact that Shabbos is a source of protection from the enemy and all harm, “more than Israel kept the Shabbos, the Shabbos kept (protected) Israel” was taught by Matriarch Rivka.

It is noteworthy that the word Shabbos is not mentioned by Rivka, or by Yaakov. The reason: Before the Torah, including Shabbos, is given on Sinai, the ancestors' observance of Shabbos, as above, is introductory. Just as for the individual, the hours of erev Shabbos is a harbinger to Shabbos, warming up to receive the Shabbos in delighted spirit, so on the collective level, the ancestors observed Shabbos on the introductory level in order to reach higher rungs when given on Mount Sinai.

Mesorah (tradition transmitted from ancestors) is, thus pivotal in our own observance of Shabbos. This concept is indicated in the Torah by the juxtaposition in the Ten Commandments. The law of Shabbos (Shemos 20:8-11) is immediately followed by the mitzvah of honoring parents (20:12). Likewise in Vayikra the two principles are mentioned in one statement. “Every man shall revere his mother and father, and My Shabbos you shall observe” (19:3).

The central BRACHA in the Shabbos Kiddush concludes והנחילנו שבת קדשך, grant us Your holy Shabbos as an inheritance. The fact that our ancestors observed the Shabbos, even though only as an introductory, before it was given on Mount Sinai, raises our own observance most significantly as an inheritance from our sainted ancestors.

