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Friday Night Done Right: The Mitzvah of Kiddush

Of all the *mitzvot* that are recognized as welcoming the Shabbat into the home, making *Kiddush* is one of the most well recognized and loved. The *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 106a) derives from the verse “Remember the Shabbat day to keep it holy” (*Shemot* 20:8) that we should sanctify the Shabbat with a verbal declaration by reciting *Kiddush* over the wine at the beginning of Shabbat on Friday night, and by reciting *Havdalah* at its conclusion on *Motza’ei Shabbat*.

The Rambam (*Hilkhot Shabbat* 29:1) describes the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush* on Friday night as a Torah obligation, to “sanctify the Shabbat day with words.” This, says the Rambam, is based on the word “-*zakhor*” – “remember.” How do we “remember” the Shabbat? By -making a blessing over wine in honor of the Shabbat day.

Why Wine?

The *Sefer Ha-Chinukh* (*mitzvat aseh* 31) explains that the *Kiddush* is meant to remind us of the special nature of Shabbat and to fix in our minds the belief that *Hashem* created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. Since “wine is the traditional symbol of joy that is used on festive occasions” (such as at a *berit milah*, under the *chuppah*, and on Jewish holidays), it is used to usher in the Shabbat on Friday night, and to escort it on *Motza’ei Shabbat*. As the *Sefer Ha-Chinukh* explains, “It is the nature of one’s heart to be awakened through the feeling of joy, and since wine brings joy to a person, it should be used to welcome the Shabbat.”

The prophet Hoshea speaks of the good deeds of *Kelal Yisrael* when he says, “They will be remembered like the wine of Lebanon” (14:8). *Tosafot* (*Pesachim* 106a) explains that the taste of wine is something that people remember with great fondness. So when we make *Kiddush* over wine we too are able to connect the Shabbat itself to the taste of the wine. So by drinking the wine we can fulfill the *mitzvah* of “remembering the Shabbat day to keep it holy.”¹³⁴

Different opinions exist as to what Adam and Chavah ate in the original sin of the *Eitz Ha-Da’at* (Tree of Knowledge). One opinion given in the *Gemara* (*Berachot* 40a) is that the fruit was grapes, from the vine. Rashi explains that the *nachash* (serpent) convinced Chavah that it also had eaten from the tree, and as a result had created the world. Thus, that original tree represents the first case in history of anyone denying *Hashem*’s existence. So by making *Kiddush* over wine we are also declaring that it was *Hashem* who created the fruit of the vine, as well as the entire world.

Let us examine the Friday night *Kiddush*, to see what ideas are revealed to us through the text chosen from the Torah and the *berakhah* of the *Kiddush* prayer.

Hashem Creates His World

Kiddush begins with the verses from the Torah describing the end of *Hashem*’s creative process (*Bereishit* 2:1–3). The verse begins with the Shabbat as the culmination of *Hashem*’s creation – “thus the heaven and the earth were completed, and all their array.” In the *piyut* (liturgical poem) *Lekha Dodi*, which is traditionally sung in the Friday night service in synagogue, the author Shlomo Alkabetz included the enigmatic phrase “*sof ma’aseh be-machshavah techillah*,” which loosely translates as “last in deed, first in thought.” This phrase was meant to describe *Hashem*’s thought process in the order of Creation. First came the idea to create the world, after which God put His plan into action. We humans also follow a similar pattern when we wish to create something of substance. For example, when people set up a business they begin with the end in mind – namely, to make a profit. That is the goal of the enterprise. They will then work backwards to realize that goal, finding which product or service is needed in the market, what tools and staff should be employed, a good location for the business etc., until the goal is realized.

¹³⁴. If an individual cannot drink wine for any reason, he or she is permitted to drink grape juice. *Kiddush* should be an enjoyable activity, and as such if wine cannot be drunk for whatever reason, then one may use grape juice instead (as it also comes from the vine, as will be explained further).

Hashem used a similar plan in creating the world. The more important parts of Creation are created later on. While all parts of Creation were necessary, the earlier components were meant to serve whatever came later in the creative process. For example, animals were created before humans, because humans feed on animals to survive. Grass and herbage appear before animals, because animals need vegetation to live, and so on and so forth. The last part of *Hashem's* creating seems to occur at the end of the sixth day – the creation of man. As such, it is clear that humans need all that preceded them in Creation in order to survive: animals, vegetation, water, etc.

However, as Rashi points out, at the end of the six days of -Creation, even with the pinnacle of Creation, man, the world was still missing something. What was it? “*Menuchah*” – “rest.” As Rashi puts it, “rest came and the work of Creation was completed and finished.”

Thus, in line with the concept of “last in deed, first in thought,” it is now clear that Shabbat was not a rest from Creation, but, since it came last, it must have been the goal of Creation, even greater and more important than the creation of man which preceded it! How can this be? How can stopping work be more important than work itself? And how can it be more of an end goal than mankind?

In order to answer this, we need to understand what *menuchah* actually is. If for example Shabbat comes to bring us only physical rest, then why wasn't Shabbat added as the last two hours of every day, say from 8 to 10 pm every night? That's when we are sometimes the most tired! Obviously the rest connoted by the phrase “*menuchah*” is not merely a physical rest from a hard week at work, but something much deeper. Let us explore what that form of deep *menuchah* really is.

So What Exactly Is Rest?

Menuchah is not merely the cessation of *melakhah* (creative action). It is a deeper rest, as we say in the *Minchah* prayer of Shabbat, “a rest of love and giving; a true rest of faith; a rest of peace, tranquility, serenity, and security; a complete rest that You *Hashem* desire for us.” R. Eliyahu Lopian (*Leiv Eliyahu* 2:290), based on this idea, describes the *menuchah* that is desired for us on Shabbat:

Menuchah of love and giving – a rest that contains love of creation and generosity of the heart. No jealousy of any other person, but happiness in what one possesses with joy for others' possessions as well.

Menuchah of truth and faith – rest that stems from recognizing the truth, that *Hashem* runs the world and will protect us in all our endeavors.

Menuchah of peace, tranquility, serenity, and security – silence and calm from the war in our souls. The spiritual battles we face cease, and instead tranquility of the soul and faith in *Hashem* restore us.

Complete *menuchah* that You *Hashem* desire for us – the -harmonization of body and soul.

Menuchah, therefore, while being an opportunity for cessation from physical work and toil, is also a deeper, more meaningful rest, whereby we create a lasting connection with *Hashem*, a time of tranquil contemplation, which the busy workweek does not always allow us to enjoy.

The *Tanna De-Vei Eliyahu* explains the verse from *Tehillim* (139:16), “days were formed, though many days, to Him they are one,” as a -reference to Shabbat. How so?

People spend six days doing *melakhah*, and then rest on the -seventh, and now have a chance to spend enjoyable time with their children and family. They then follow the same pattern weekly, work for six days, and then rest on the seventh. Once a week for a full day we are given a respite from all our troubles and stresses of the workweek. Such is the way of mankind: a good day has the power to allow us to forget the days of difficulty that preceded it.

So Shabbat gives us a chance to rest from the stresses of life and to refocus on what should be central to our lives. First and foremost we are enjoined to recall *Hashem's* existence, something we may have overlooked during our busy weekday dealings. It is for this reason that we have a special *mitzvah* to recite the *Kiddush* at the earliest opportunity after nightfall. As soon as a person comes home from shul, he should recite *Kiddush* (*Magen Avraham* 271:1). This, says the *Chatam Sofer* (*Shulchan Arukh* 271), demonstrates that the *menuchah* on Shabbat is not only about our own relaxation, but also because *Hashem* rested on that day.

Menuchah enables us to also place emphasis on our spiritual responsibilities as Jewish people. We can take stock of our spiritual lives. We can ask ourselves, are we performing as well as we can? Are we learning enough Torah?

And then, most importantly, we can give attention to the reason, according to the Rambam, that we were actually put in this world in the first place: to work on our character traits. Let's explore this last idea a little more closely.

Don't Get Mad, Get Shabbat!

By pulling out of the weekly grind, we can focus on improvement of our souls. One of the key ways we are expected to do this is to work on *midot* (character traits). As the *Sichot Mussar (Ma'amar 12)* explains:

The Torah wants us to rest up, so we can work on what is really important, namely our *midot*. By doing so, we can remove from our hearts all traces of anger and tension, so that not even a vestige of these negative traits still remains once Shabbat has passed.

As R. Chaim Friedlander (*Siftei Chaim, cheilek 3, p. 401*) explains:

If people merely stopped performing *melakhah* activities once a week, they could still be filled with the anxieties of the workweek running through their minds, and their *menuchah* would in fact not be a real *menuchah*! External *menuchah* is not the goal; rather a deep inner serenity should be deeply felt by the person, which will create a feeling of *sheleimut* (wholeness). Where do we see people achieving such a level? Only on the holy Shabbat, as that was the day *Hashem* finished creating His world, and brought all creation to its final completed state.

So since *menuchah* was actually created on Shabbat, that is where it can be found. On Shabbat we are able to tap into that energy once a week, thereby enabling us to truly work on ourselves.¹³⁵ Thereby, we can change parts of our personalities that we otherwise would not have been able to access, had the workweek lasted for seven days. This is the power that only Shabbat can bestow upon us, because that is what it was created for.

What then is the method we employ to actually feel this *-menuchah*? The answer is twofold. We stop work, which means refraining from the thirty-nine *melakhot*. We also perform certain positive actions that help us reach the state of *menuchah*. Reciting *Kiddush* is an example of such a positive *mitzvah*. Every Friday night we make a statement that *Hashem* created the world, and we are therefore not the Creator. We may spend six days creating, but the ultimate Creator of everything is *Hashem*.¹³⁶

The Shabbat Is Blessed!

The third verse we read as part of *Kiddush* introduces a word that appears many times in the Torah, but appears here first, "*va-yevarekh*" – *berakhah* (blessing). The Kabbalists explain that the first time a word appears in the Torah is where we can derive its true essence and meaning. Hence, since the concept of *berakhah* first appears in relation to Shabbat, although it is used repeatedly to describe people, places, and things later on in the Torah, its true *shoresh* (source) is Shabbat. What form does this *-berakhah* take in relation to Shabbat?

Rashi (on *Bereishit 2:3*) explains that this *berakhah* was experienced when the *Benei Yisrael* were in the desert for forty years in the form of the *man*. The *man* was a food that fell miraculously for the *Benei Yisrael* from the heavens for the entire forty years they were in the -desert. Once a week, on Friday, they received *lechem mishneh* (double portion) of this miraculous food. We recall this miracle every Shabbat by -having a double portion of bread for each of the three Shabbat meals. The question we must ask on this Rashi is since the *man* does not fall for us anymore, what precisely is the verse referring to outside of the forty years we spent in the desert?

Shabbat: The Source of All *Berakhah*

We read in the song *Lekha Dodi* the words "Welcome Shabbat, come let us go, for it is the *mekor ha-berakhah* (source of all blessing)." The words "*mekor ha-berakhah*," says the *Zohar (Parashat Yitro 88a)*, mean that all *berakhah* that exists in the upper worlds and the lower worlds are dependent on the Shabbat day. The *Zohar* similarly explains this a

¹³⁵. Interestingly there is no astronomical cycle of seven days. The world follows a -24-hour cycle of the day, an approximately 30-day cycle for the month, and a 365-day cycle for the year. Yet incredibly, every nation in the world keeps a seven-day week. The idea of a seven-day week stems exclusively from our Torah, and not from any external astronomical source. Yet every nation follows the exact same seven-day week! It seems as though from Creation and onwards a natural seven-day rhythm pervades the world. People naturally feel the beat of six days and rest, six days and rest, six days and rest.

¹³⁶. As the *Kuzari* explains, by doing this we prevent ourselves falling into the trap of perceived omnipotence. By creating for seven days a person may come to believe he is the Creator Himself! Stop your work, says the *Kuzari*, realize your limitations, and acknowledge a Power higher than yourself is running the world around you.

little earlier (in *Parashat Beshalach* 63b) that each and every day receives its blessing from the Shabbat itself. Shabbat therefore is truly the source of all blessing, as without it, the weekdays would have no source of -blessing for themselves.¹³⁷

So the *man* was a tangible example of the power of blessing that we are able to receive from the Shabbat. As R. Yitzchak Meltzen (*Si'ach Yitzchak, Arvit Le-Shabbat*) explains:

From the moment of Creation, *Hashem* decreed that Shabbat will be the source of all blessings that will transpire during the week. It was this decree that permitted the *man* to fall throughout the week. The blessing power of Shabbat is not limited to one point in Jewish history, it exists right through all times and all generations, as we read in the *piyut Ki Eshmerah Shabbat*, "*hinei le-dor rishon, natan kedoshi, mofeit be-teit lechem mishneh bashishi, kakhah ve-khol shishi, yakhpil mezoni*" – "Just as the first -generation were given holiness, the incredible wonder of the double bread, so too each Friday our sustenance is doubled."

To illustrate the tremendous power of Shabbat blessing, the son of the *Chafetz Chaim*, in *Dugma Me-Sichat Avi* (31) tells the incredible story about his father's visit to Moscow to deal with matters related to his yeshiva. He explains that the *Chafetz Chaim*, while in Moscow, met a successful businessman who owned a factory. Whilst being an otherwise observant Jew, he let his business run into Shabbat, and started running the business while it was still Shabbat. The *Chafetz Chaim* proceeded to explain to the man the mistake he was making, by way of an analogy:

Once a man agreed to sell many sacks of wheat to a Jewish merchant. To keep track of the many sacks, the men used a chalk to place a mark on the wall, corresponding to every sack. When all the wheat sacks would change hands, they would count the chalk marks, and the man would pay the Jewish merchant based on the final amount of chalk marks that had accumulated on the wall. While the counting took place, the seller became worried that during the handling of the sacks chalk marks would be wiped off the wall and he would lose money in the final count.

The seller suggested another method of keeping track of the wheat sacks. For every sack, the Jewish merchant would give a coin to the seller. At the end of the day, they would count the coins, and for each coin the seller would receive full payment for the sack. This plan worked well, until the seller started to feel the weight of the coins in his pocket. The desire for all these coins was too great and he started to secretly steal a coin from his own pocket and place it into his bag to keep for himself.

"How foolish was this seller," explained the *Chafetz Chaim*. "By stealing the coins from his pocket, he was really stealing from himself, as there would be fewer coins to count at the end of the day!" Now, addressing the businessman directly, he said, "So too are you acting foolishly. By having your factory open for business for a few minutes on Shabbat, you are stealing from your own pocket, because your Shabbat observance is the real source of your business's success!"

This story of the *Chafetz Chaim* helps us understand the *gemara* in *Shabbat* 119a a little better. The *gemara* there asks the following question: "In what merit do the Jewish people who live outside the Land of Israel have in being so financially successful?" The answer, says the *gemara*, is because they give so much honor to the holy Shabbat.

Another incident found in the *gemara* (*Megillah* 27b) relates the story of the disciples of R. Zakkai. They once asked him, "In the merit of what good deed did you attain such a long life?" He responded, "-During my entire life I never missed reciting *Kiddush* over wine. I had an elderly mother and once I had no wine to make *Kiddush* over. She sold her headdress and brought me wine for *Kiddush*." The *gemara* concludes by informing us that when R. Zakkai's mother died, she left him three hundred barrels of wine, and when he died, he left his children three thousand barrels of wine!

Such is the *berakhah* potential of the Shabbat.¹³⁸

¹³⁷. Interestingly, the word "*berakhah*" literally means "a source," usually referring to a source of water. Shabbat, like a source of water, is the source, from where the rest of the week receives its spiritual nourishment.

¹³⁸. This Shabbat blessing, says the *Ya'avetz* in his *siddur*, is the root of the custom to bless our children on Friday night (some bless before *Kiddush* and some bless following *Kiddush*). Since blessing permeates the Shabbat, and therefore the home, parents are able to harness that blessing and to pass it onto their children specifically on Shabbat. This is coupled with the fact that each person is given a *neshamah yeteirah* (extra soul) on Shabbat, enabling the blessing to flow from parent to child. Adds the *Zohar*, "Since it is Shabbat, the Satan has less ability to block the effectiveness of the *berakhah* and its transmission from parent to child" (as quoted in *Be-Ma'alot Ha-Shabbat* by R. Yaakov Streiker).

Standing for Kiddush

The Shabbat is one of the only ritualistic *mitzvot* included in the *Aseret Ha-Dibrot* (Ten Commandments). As part of the ritual of *Kiddush*, many people make a blessing over wine while standing. What is the root of this custom?

The design of the *Aseret Ha-Dibrot* may assist us in understanding this custom.

The *Gemara* informs us that the design of the tablets was stone blocks, with the letters chiseled into and through the stone itself. The common question asked about the *Aseret Ha-Dibrot* is why they had to be given on two separate stones. The answer commonly given is that there is a thematic connection between the *mitzvot* on each *lu'ach* (block). Thus, the *mitzvot* that appear vertically on the first *lu'ach* (one through five) are *bein adam la-Makom* (between man and *Hashem*), whereas the latter five *mitzvot* (six through ten), which appear vertically on the second *lu'ach*, are *bein adam le-chaveiro* (between man and man).

Rashi on *Shir Ha-Shirim* 4:5 gives another fascinating reason for the need for two *luchot*. Not only are there vertical connections within each *lu'ach*, but there are also horizontal connections, as well, from *lu'ach* to *lu'ach*. Meaning, the first and sixth *dibrot* are connected, as are the second and seventh, third and eighth, fourth and ninth, and fifth and tenth. The corresponding *dibur* for Shabbat (*dibur* number four) on the second *lu'ach*, *dibur* nine, is "you should not be a false witness."

How is being an honest witness in a court of law connected to Shabbat? The answer is encapsulated in the concept of *emet* (truth). We are expected to live a life of truth, whether between ourselves and our fellow man (by not being a false witness in a court of law) or between ourselves and *Hashem* (by keeping Shabbat) – *emet* is something we must always strive for. When we testify in a court of law, or discuss the truth of *Hashem's* existence, or any other activity we find ourselves involved in, *emet* is our goal.

This may explain why many have the custom to stand for *Kiddush* on Friday night, or at least for part of it. Just as witnesses, before they swear in to give testimony in a court of law, stand up, so too we, who are testifying during the *Kiddush* prayer – that *Hashem* exists and created the world in six days, and then rested on the seventh – stand as well. For the past three and half thousand years the Jewish people have been the living witnesses of three truths: that *Hashem* created the world, He controls what happens in it, and He is personally involved in each of that world's inhabitants' lives. By making *Kiddush* every Friday night, we become part of this national testimony.

Furthermore, this idea is hinted at in the last three words we read in *Kiddush*, "*barah Elokim la-asot*" – "God created to do." The *sofei teivot* (last letters) of these words are: *aleph*, *mem*, and *taf*, which together spell "*emet*."

The Nature of Shabbat Holiness

The final blessing that we recite as part of Friday night *Kiddush* is, "blessed are You *Hashem* who makes the Shabbat holy (*mekadesh -ha-Shabbat*)." What is the nature of this holiness? In what way is the Shabbat holier than the days that surround it?

R. Shimshon Pinkus, in the introduction to his book *Shabbat Malkheta*, asks the following question, which leads us to understanding the nature of this holiness: What is the essence of the Shabbat day? We pretty much know what the theme of every holiday is. *Pesach* is about the idea of freedom, *Shavuot* is about the giving of the Torah, *Sukkot* is faith and happiness. So what exactly is the theme of Shabbat? He answers this question using the following analogy:

Imagine receiving a personal dinner invitation to the home of the *gadol ha-dor* (Torah leader of the generation). What would you wear? Would you dare be late? When entering would you decline any food saying you already ate? Obviously not. Obviously you would dress well, arrive early, and eat what is offered to you. The reason being that you would be eating not only for yourself and own pleasure, but also for the honor of the host. So too on Shabbat, we are invited once a week to enjoy a meal with *Hashem* Himself! How could we possibly resist such an invitation? Only the finest wines, foods, behavior, and atmosphere will do at such an encounter.

This, says R. Pinkus, is the source of the *kedushah* of Shabbat – it is *Hashem's* day! After all, the source of the holiness of Shabbat is *Hashem*. It is *Hashem* who sanctifies the day, and it is *Hashem* who places Himself at the center of the day. And *Kiddush* is the means by which we enter that reality of *Hashem's* world, and become part of His plan for His people, on His day, the holy Shabbat.

May our *Kiddush* on Friday night help us experience this connection, and this holiness, both on Shabbat and throughout the week.