

Mitokh Ha-Ohel
מתוך האוהל

Essays on the Weekly Parashah from the
Rabbis and Professors of Yeshiva University

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and Stuart W. Halpern, Editors

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ספר בראשית

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm

Introductory Essay: How to Read the Torah¹

I

These comments on “How to Read the Torah,” are not meant to be a demonstration of cantillations or a means of training formal Torah readers. Rather, they are an attempt to set some guidelines as we begin again the cycle of portions of the Torah.

At one point in this *sidrah*, we read “*zeh sefer toledot adam*,” which translates as “this is the book of the generations of Man” (*Bereishit* 5:1). Most commentators take that to mean not “book” in the formal sense of a volume, but as a listing of the generations that derived from Adam. Ramban, however, takes the word *sefer* literally, and tells us that “*kol ha-Torah kulah sefer toledot adam*,” it refers to the entire Torah, which is the “book of the generations of Man” (Ramban, *Bereishit* 5:1–2, s.v. *zeh sefer toledot adam*). Torah is the story of mankind. The Book is opposite to Man.

The *Kabbalah* affirmed this idea in many ways. For instance, the Holy Ari maintained that by mystical permutations, the number of souls

1. Adapted from a sermon delivered on October 16, 1971.

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of Israel present at *Har Sinai* is equal to the number of letters in the Torah. Again, we find the equivalence between Book and Man.

Hence, the approach to know the Book is akin to that of knowing Man. You learn how to understand the *sefer* from how you understand Man. Books may teach us much about people; but people can tell us more about books. And this is so especially concerning the Book of Books, the Torah. “*Zeh sefer toledot adam.*”

II

The first thing that we must learn is: respect. In order to genuinely know a man, you must consider him worthy of your study and friendship and concern. If he is not worthy, then your knowledge of him is superficial and unimportant. And what is true of man, is true of text, of Torah. At the very least, respect means not to ignore it. To sit in the presence of Torah and not consider it, is like staying in the presence of another human being and acting as if he does not exist – few insults are more humiliating than that. To read Torah, you must be serious, and that means high-minded – truly religious. A real student of Torah may never be flippant. You may be puzzled by a *pasuk*, or be put off by a *parashah*, but you must always approach Torah with humility.

The founder of the *Chabad* movement, in his *Shulchan Arukh*, gives us an interesting derivation of the Jewish custom to walk with one’s head covered. The reason is *tzeni’ut*, modesty. Clothing is worn for one of two reasons: warmth or modesty. The head covering is too small to serve for purposes of warmth; it is there for reasons of *tzeni’ut*. It is our way of expressing before God the limitations of our intellectual self-sufficiency. We cover our heads to indicate that we have a degree of bashfulness about our intellectual inadequacy in the face of God. This is how we approach the study of Torah – with respect and humility. This does not mean that what is demanded of us is intellectual capitulation and submission, only modesty and reverence.

Respect for Torah also means that we must not assume too much about Torah in advance. Do not approach the sacred text with ready-made conclusions. I know people who read a portion of the Torah with a “nothing but” attitude: the Torah is “nothing but” a collection of Mid-Eastern myths; “nothing but” a record of early religious superstitions;

“nothing but” primitive science; “nothing but” the fear of the unknown expressed magically. With such presumptuous attitudes you emerge from your encounter with Torah knowing nothing more than the smug prejudices with which you began.

In a sense, I would say that respect means not to get too close to Torah. Despite the fact that Torah is closer to us than anything else – “*ki karov elekha ha-davar me’od*” (*Devarim* 30:14) – you must not get too close to it, you must avoid excessive intimacy, the familiarity which breeds contempt – a fact true both of men and of books. When we are too much “at home” with Torah, when we are “pals” with the text, and we lose the distance which makes both for reverence and perspective, we allow ourselves the liberty of making snap judgments which are unworthy. That is why when we read the Torah we use the silver pointer. The *Halakhah* forbids us to touch the inner part of the Torah scroll. Should we contact the parchment, our hands become unclean – *tum’at yadayim* – and the reason is, primarily, to keep us respectful by forbidding us to handle the sacred scroll directly. We must not lay hands on the Torah; thus we learn to respect it.

III

The second guideline in how to read the Torah is – the awareness of its depth. “*Zeh sefer toledot adam.*” Just as you do not “read” a man, because he is too complex and deep and requires studying and investigation, analysis and pondering, so it is with Torah. When you say of a man, “I can read him like a book,” you diminish his humanity, you reduce him to a manageable and controllable automaton, one whose Pavlovian reactions are all predictable, and hence one who has been de-personalized into a mere mechanism. So if we ask, how do you read the Torah? The answer is: don’t *read* it! Go much deeper than reading. Reading of the Torah in the synagogue, in its formal sense, with all its carefully prepared melodies and exact text, is only the challenge to what we ought to do, each of us, privately: go deep, ever deeper. It is not enough to read, one must study; it is not to *lein* the Torah, one must learn; it is inadequate to have *keri’ah*, one must have *limmud* of the Torah. For both Man and Torah are living things, organic beings, and merely reading the Torah is like describing a man’s physical qualities: in neither case have I captured the soul, the essence.

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That is why our tradition recommends at least four methods of interpretation, the famous *Pardes*. It is because we know that there is depth upon depth and layer upon layer, and that various forms of interpretation are valid.

Several years ago, someone wrote a book in which he tried to trace the origins of Freud's seminal idea of depth-psychology, that the human consciousness consists of layer upon layer of awareness, and that we can dig ever deeper until we come to the root of a man's psychic life. This writer (Bakan) maintained that Freud derived his notions, despite the paucity of his formal Jewish education, from the Jewish ideas which were vaguely, but pervasively, present in his environment. One of these great ideas was that of the *Kabbalah* and its teaching that the Torah must never be understood only on one level, but that it is a mine or reservoir of infinite layers of meaning, and that when you have plumbed one, you must still plumb the next, and when you have done the next, you must prepare to dig even deeper to a newer and more profound level of meaning. I do not know if that writer is right or not; I believe he exaggerates. But certainly today *we* must reverse the direction of the equation. Today we know a great deal about depth psychology, about the layers of meaning in a man's life. We must now conclude the same about Torah – for this is “the book of the generations of Man.” What is true of Man is true of Torah: each contains depth upon depth, layer upon layer and level beneath level.

IV

The third thing that we must learn in approaching Torah is that, despite all our scholarly techniques and modes of analysis to probe depth, learning must yet remain an existential encounter. When you truly know another human being, you know more than the sum of his various parts, his physical description, his psychic condition, his clothing and the state of his liver and bile and cardiogram. There is more to man than merely that. There is a sense of mystery. The encounter with him is a genuine experience. Meeting him is what Buber calls an “I-Thou” relationship. You see him as an equal *gestalt*, not as a mere “it.” And so it is with the text of Torah. You must look upon it not as merely an ancient document,

not merely as a problem in legal philosophy, not merely as a record of ancient history, but as something living, something dynamic, as an encounter with a “thou” that preserves and realizes the eternal Thou.

In Hebrew, *Da'at* means more than intellectual cognition. “Knowledge” in the Biblical scheme means total knowledge, which includes the physical and the spiritual, the material and the psychological and the intellectual. When Adam “knew” his wife Eve, the knowledge covered all areas of human existence, from the sexual to the spiritual. The same word *Da'at*, or knowledge, is used for the knowledge of God: it means more than merely a profound grasp of theology or a listing of the philosophical interpretations of the negative attributes of God. It comprehends the totality of existence. So too, we learn from *Man to Book: Da'at Torah*, the knowledge of Torah, is more than analysis; it is a profoundly existential meeting with Torah itself. In a word, it is a learning of love.

This encounter of love, both in the case of Man and in the case of the Book, involves a recognition that the one we encounter has absolute individuality, a uniqueness that is irreplaceable. If I know (love) another human being, then I know that person as one who cannot be duplicated, who is utterly different. The same holds true when I know a passage of Torah.

Furthermore, to know in the sense of love means – to want to know more! Maimonides, in the beginning of his great Code, teaches us, concerning the love of God, that when you contemplate the marvels of nature, you begin to love God and then “*miyad hu... mit'avveh ta'avah gedolah leida Ha-Shem Ha-Gadol*” (Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhhot Yesodei Torah* 2:2) – immediately you are seized with an uncontrollable passion to know the great Name. So it is with Man too. When you love someone, your desire for knowledge, your appetite for knowing him or her more, is insatiable. The more you know, the more you want to know. And that is precisely the condition that one must obtain in Torah study. If you study Torah with an attitude to love, you will never be satisfied with what you know, you will always strive for more.

Reading or studying Torah with love also sensitizes you to the novelties and surprises that are latent within Torah. It sensitizes you

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to the unpredictably delightful ideas waiting to be conjured up by love and intelligence.

A year or two ago, there appeared a book edited by Marshall and Hample, which was a collection of children's letters to God. One of them, most appropriate to this *parashah*, read as follows:

Dear God:

Maybe you can write some more stories because we've already read everything you have written more than once. Thanks in advance.

Some people take that childish attitude with regard to the study of the Torah as we commence *Bereishit* once again: the same stories, the same laws, not a single change. Indeed, should the Torah reader decide to make a single change, we pounce upon him and correct him. The conclusion – it is repetitive and boring. But that is a childish attitude. If our attitude is mature, if we approach Torah with respect, with awareness of its depth, and with love, then the new cycle of *sidrot* means for us the anticipation of new discoveries, novel insights, great ideas we have not yet been introduced to.

V

Fourth, and finally, the right attitude for the study of Torah means that we must read it critically and persistently, using every tool of intelligence and research. To approach Torah with respect and with love does not mean that we can get away with *frumkeit*, with piety, alone. A student of Torah must be pious, but piety itself is no guarantee or substitute for scholarship. If you acknowledge that Torah has depth, and you approach Torah with respect and love, you will also want to be deserving of Torah's love and respect in return. As with a human being, if you relate to him or her uncritically, without discrimination and taste, gullibly and simply – you may not find your affections reciprocated. Torah, too, is not satisfied with unsophisticated naiveté. It demands far more from us – a critical attitude, a willingness to meet Torah's problems head on, acumen, and discriminating intelligence.

The *Zohar*, in a remarkable passage that sounds as if it were taken

out of the courtly tradition of love, compares the Torah to a damsel locked in a castle. The student of Torah, enamored of the princess, marches to and fro waiting for a glimpse of his beloved. No one recognizes what he is doing there or what goes on in his heart. The damsel occasionally comes to the balcony, shows herself, and quickly returns. He is tempted to look for her and come to the castle. The princess then hides behind the curtain, only letting him occasionally hear her voice. As he pursues his search, she rewards him with an occasional glimpse of her face, challenging her lover to seek her, to discover her. But if the lover (or student of Torah) is discouraged too quickly, if he is impatient, if he ceases his search because he is frustrated, she is annoyed at him and calls out, "*Peti*" ("fool")! "*Peti ya'amin le-khol davar*" ("a fool believes anything")! (*Mishlei* 14:15). He is uncritical, he can be bluffed! The Torah does not want fools. It does not even want innocent and pious fools. It demands persistence, criticism, determination and intelligence. It wants the brightness that God gave us to be applied to it and its problems, to searching it out and to finding it out.

What real student of Torah does not know of the delight of this flirtatious game played by Torah as part of the romance of the study of the Torah? If you are impatient, if you have no verve, no ambition – then you do not even know that there is a princess in the palace! If you do know it, then by all means follow the lead, search her out, never stop in your persistent search for Torah and for truth, using every ounce, every fiber of criticism and intelligence. You must follow through the tantalizing leads, the ideas waiting to be exposed, the insights teasingly concealed but anxious to be found out. Torah hides only because she wants you to find her.

VI

These are the four elements in how to read the Torah. "*Zeh sefer toledot adam*," they are equivalent to the knowledge of Man. In both, genuine knowledge requires respect, awareness of depth, love, and a persistent and critical attitude. These must be employed as we proceed upon another year of the study of Torah, both in the synagogue during services and especially in the various classes in which all of us are called upon to attend.

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VII

The rewards are beyond description. At the very least they will give us a pride, a sense of identity, a sense of sufficiency of the spirit. A learning Jew is not a frightened Jew. Only an *am ha-aretz*, an ignoramus, is always afraid and apprehensive. A learning Jew can take any anti-Semitism in stride; an *am ha-aretz* is always seized with panic and hysteria, usually out of proportion to the threat.

Some time ago I discussed with an uncle the problem of anti-Semitism. I know how American Jews react to it, but I was curious as to the psychology of the Jew who lived all his life in the *shtetl*. This uncle, who has shared in both cultures and both worlds, told me of how when he was a child he was walking with his grandfather, my great-grandfather – the man after whom I am named, and who was known reverently and affectionately in our family by the name of the town where he served as Rav, the Kretzinsker *Zeide* – they were accosted by a young Polish peasant who hurled at them every foul-mouthed anti-Semitic insult, which has become a venerable tradition among both Polish peasants and intellectuals. My uncle, having been exposed to the modern world, was shaken. Yet he noticed that my great-grandfather simply continued, as if nothing at all had ever happened: impassive, unruffled, unconcerned. Said my uncle to my great grandfather: “How come? How can you just continue? Aren’t you bothered by all this?” The Kretzinsker *Zeide* replied: “What are you talking about? How can I possibly be concerned by the likes of him? Don’t you understand? – ‘*Ich hob dach a Toirah*’ – I am a man who has a Torah! A man who has Torah is never concerned by the rantings and the ravings of some semi-ignorant lunatic. The slings and arrows of that kind of fortune can never hurt him.”

So let us begin this year with the pride of having the Torah. Let us be people of Torah. Let us never be satisfied with merely hearing the Torah being read on *Shabbat*. Let us proceed to study it during the week as well. If we are Orthodox Jews, if we are proud Jews, we must be studying Jews. “*Ki hem chayeinu ve-orekh yameinu*” (Rav Amram Ga’on, *Siddur*) – because that is what life, certainly Jewish life, is all about.

Rabbi David Fohrman

בראשית: The Mystery of *Shabbat*

F

or most of us, the weekly *Shabbat* experience eventually becomes part of our regular routine. We refrain from performing labor on *Shabbat* almost instinctively. The light switch, the telephone, the car – it seems as natural to avoid these things on *Shabbat* as it does to use them during the week.

So it can seem surprising to us when someone from outside the system questions the meaning of our day of rest. But every once in a while, that happens. In an office, on a plane trip – we’ll get questions from strangers about *Shabbat*. One of the most common questions concerns what seems like a quirk in the way Orthodox Jews observe *Shabbat*: switching on a light on *Shabbat* is for some reason considered “work,” and is off-limits during this day of rest. But dragging a heavy table from one end of a room to another somehow escapes classification as work, and is a permitted activity. This sounds bizarre and nonsensical. We are often asked: Is there any rhyme or reason to be found here?

But other questions abound, too. In this essay, we will explore the *pesukim* in the Torah that introduce *Shabbat*, and we shall do so through

the prism of various questions – various conundrums we face when we try and define the Jewish concept of *Shabbat* to strangers. By so doing, we will gain a greater ability to explain *Shabbat* to both the strangers in our lives, and to ourselves.

TWO THEOLOGICAL QUESTION MARKS

Let's begin with an almost childlike, philosophical question: "Why, exactly, would God feel it necessary to rest after creating the Universe? Was He tired?"

The question isn't as facetious as it sounds. We conceive of the Almighty as an All-Powerful being. That, indeed, is why we call Him "the Almighty." So if God is really All-Powerful, how difficult would it have been for Him to create a Universe? Presumably, this didn't require a lot of exertion on His behalf. Well, then, why did He need to rest afterwards?

And here's another conundrum: Most of us assume that our observance of *Shabbat* is reflective of our faith that God is the Creator of the Universe. After all, the Torah explains the observance of *Shabbat* by telling us that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. But there is something odd about this. For why do we commemorate God's creation of the Universe through a day of rest? Wouldn't it have been more appropriate to set aside, instead, a day of creation?

In case this question doesn't strike you as all that troubling, let's make it more concrete. Let's leave the realm of theology behind, and couch the problem in more mundane terms.

Imagine that the Federal government decided it would be a good idea to create an annual "Rosa Parks Day" on the calendar. The idea would be to set aside a day on the yearly calendar when all Americans would commemorate the civil rights triumph of Rosa, the black woman who refused to give up her seat to a white man on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama. And imagine that a committee was casting about for some sort of symbolic activity that citizens could perform on this day to honor Rosa Parks' great act. Some members of the committee suggested that concerned citizens could ride local city buses, and crowd to the front of the bus. For a symbolic trip around town, no one would sit in the back. But then, somebody in the back of the room had a different idea. On Rosa Parks Day, everyone should go home, and take a nap in

bed. Why? Because, you see, after Rosa Parks took her historic ride on the bus, she was tired and she went home to rest in bed. So let's all do the same: we too shall take a nap, just like Rosa did.

Few people would consider this a spectacular idea. Yet somehow, on *Shabbat*, it seems like precisely this is happening. We commemorate *Hashem's* historic act of creating the world – yet we do so by *resting*. But shouldn't we instead remember Creation by creating? The point isn't that God rested – it's that He made the world, right? Isn't "rest" just incidental?

BACK TO THE TEXT

Let's turn to the text of the Torah and see what it has to say to us about all this. In *Bereishit*, the Torah chronicles the coming into being of the very first *Shabbat*. Read the following *pesukim* carefully and pay attention to this question: According to the text, what exactly is *Shabbat* designed to commemorate?

God finished on the seventh day the work that He had made, and He rested on the seventh day from all the work that He had made. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work that God had created to make. (*Bereishit* 2:1–3)

These *pesukim* tell us why *Hashem* deemed the Seventh Day special: *because on this day He rested*. As strange as it may seem, the Torah is telling us that *Shabbat* is not, actually, a celebration of God's creation of the Universe. Rather, it is a celebration of *His rest*.

This idea, when you reflect on it, is downright astounding. How could anyone think that God's rest is more important than His work – than the very act of creating the world? It sounds roughly like saying that the purpose of work is vacation. Vacation might be nice, but is vacation really what the work is all about? Yet, strangely, what the Torah is saying is clear: *Shabbat* is not a celebration of creation; it is a celebration of rest.

In case you missed the point, the Torah emphasizes the same idea again, later on, in *Sefer Shemot*. In the verses we recite as *kiddush* on *Shabbat* morning, the Torah tells us that *Shabbat*, "Is a sign between

Me and the Jewish People that: six days, God created the Heavens and the Earth ... and on the seventh day He rested” (*Shemot* 31:17).

According to the *pasuk*, what is the essential fact that the “sign” of *Shabbat* testifies to? That God created the world in six days? No. Were that true, the Torah should have ended the *pasuk* halfway through. The emphasis of the text is on the final clause, “and on the Seventh Day He rested.” *Shabbat* commemorates that *after Hashem* got through creating the world in six days, He decided to rest on the seventh.

But what’s the big deal about that rest? It just sounds anti-climactic.

PURPOSEFUL REST

Evidently, the verses are telling us we need to reassess our ideas about work and rest. God’s rest, apparently, had very little in common with the idea of vacation. It was not something that merely happened after God created the world; it was not that God took some time off for a breather. The Creator’s rest was a deliberate act. It was a kind of rest that was, somehow, an end in and of itself – “You made the seventh day holy for Your Name, it being the very purpose of the making of Heaven and Earth.”

These words come from the Friday night *shemoneh esrei* that we recite every week. But listen to what we are saying. *Shabbat*, and its rest, is portrayed as the very purpose of Creation, the end for which the entire Heavens and Earth were created.

What does it mean to see rest in this way, not as something you do to help you work, but rather as something which is the very point of all your labor? Why would God consider His rest more worthy of commemoration than His successful Creation of a Universe?

The question becomes even more insistent when we remember that God deemed *Shabbat* to be special long before there was any nation around to celebrate it. According to the *pesukim* in *Bereishit*, Ch. 2, God blessed and made *Shabbat* holy immediately after creating the Universe. He shared that day with us only centuries later, when He gave us the Torah, letting us in on His special secret. Thus, *Shabbat* was not crafted by God for the benefit of people – that only happened later. Rather, this island in time was designed by the Creator for Himself, as it were.

Why would the Creator be so personally committed to His own day of rest?

EXACTLY WHAT WAS GOD DOING ON THAT SEVENTH DAY?

A clue comes from the *pasuk* in the Torah that first introduces us to the idea of *Shabbat*. One of these *pesukim* seems to contradict itself: “And God finished on the seventh day the work that He had made, and He rested on the seventh day from all the work that He had made (*Bereishit* 2:2).”

Perhaps you spotted the difficulty: What, exactly, did *Hashem* do on the seventh day? Did He rest or did He work? The answer seems to depend on which part of the verse you focus upon.

The first part tells us that God finished on the seventh day the work that He had made. This seems to suggest that *Hashem* did *some* work on the seventh day. He completed His efforts on that day.

But then the verse goes on to say that *Hashem* rested on the seventh day from *all* the work that He had made. This second phrase seems to tell us that God was *not* working on the seventh day. To the contrary, He rested from *all his work* on this day.

So which is it? Did God rest from all His work on the seventh day, or did He create something on this day?

RASHI’S ANSWER

As it turns out, we are not the first to come upon this question. Rashi addresses it and gives two possible answers to the problem.

One answer Rashi suggests is that perhaps God finished creating the world at the very instant that the sixth day ended and the seventh day began. In that way, He would have finished creating on the seventh day, i.e. on the instant the day began, but would still have rested for the entirety of that day.

That’s Rashi’s first answer. But he gives a second answer as well, a solution that doesn’t require us to split hairs in time between the sixth and seventh day.

Rashi’s second answer suggests that the contradiction is just an illusion. Rashi argues that God indeed created something on the seventh day – and simultaneously, He was completely at rest on that day. The thing that the Almighty created on the seventh day, Rashi says, was rest itself. God brought rest into existence on the *Shabbat*.

Now, this answer certainly seems ingenious; it allows us to see

how God could both rest and create at the same time. But, the answer smacks a bit of wordplay. What does it mean that God “created” rest? Is rest something that needed to be created? Rest is just the absence of work. If God wanted rest, all He would have to do is stop working. Right?

Wrong.

Rashi is suggesting to us that there is such a thing as rest that needs to be created. It is a kind of rest that is different from the rest we usually experience, which is the mere absence of labor. It is a rest which is not just a negative phenomenon, but a positive one. It is not an absence, but a presence.

UNDERSTANDING REST BY UNDERSTANDING “WORK”

To get a better handle on this elusive notion of God’s rest, we might do well to ponder for a moment the nature of God’s “work.” If we can understand more clearly what God was up to those first six days, we may be better able to understand what it means to say that He “rested” from this activity on the seventh.

The term that *Halakhah* assigns to labor on *Shabbat* is *melakhah*. The word is borrowed from *Bereishit* Ch. 2, which describes the “labor” that God was involved in when creating the world. The labor which we desist from on *Shabbat* corresponds in some fundamental way to the labor God desisted from on the original *Shabbat*.

The truth is, “labor” is probably the wrong word to be using here. The English term “labor” conjures up images of sweat and hardship – images which obviously have little to do with Divine creation of the Universe (how *hard* is it for an All-Powerful God to create a world?).

Melakhah is a more specialized word, and is different than the other, more common word for work, *avodah*, which indicates a mundane, run-of-the-mill kind of labor. It suggests the kind of work that requires exertion and makes you tired. *Melakhah*, on the other hand, calls to mind something else entirely.

The Torah classifies thirty-nine basic acts as *melakhah*. With the possible exception of carrying, the common denominator of all thirty-nine is the idea of transformation, of taking a certain substance present in the world, and transforming it into a higher, more developed state of being, through an intelligent agent’s conscious intervention. When I

bake something, I take mere raw ingredients and make them into a cake. When I weave something, I take mere threads and create a cloak. I am developing the world around me, molding it to suit my will.

It was this kind of work that the Almighty engaged in for most of the six days of Creation.

Think about it. In the first moment of *Bereishit*, God made something from nothing. First there was Nothing; then, all of a sudden, there was Something.

From then on, though, He was pretty much doing something else. He was generally taking that which was, and molding it into something more complex and sophisticated. He was taking electrons and protons and molding them into hydrogen atoms. He was taking water, and causing species of marine life to arise from it (*Bereishit* 1:20). He was taking earth, and fashioning out of it the body of a human being (*ibid.*, 2:7). God was performing *melakhah*, the kind of thing you do when you want to create a world.

GOD'S MELAKHAH; MAN'S MELAKHAH

We are now, incidentally, ready to respond to that co-worker, acquaintance or seatmate on a plane who asks about the funny way we seem to observe *Shabbat*.

The answer lies in an understanding of the nature of *melakhah*.

When God created the world, His activity had very little in common with dragging a heavy table around the house. But it had everything to do with igniting the filament inside a light bulb.

Dragging a table just moves things around. It isn't "transformative" in any way. Igniting the filament, though, – as routine as it seems – is an act of *melakhah*, one in which man purposefully transforms his surroundings to suit his needs. Every time man kindles fire, plows, weaves – no matter how easily and routinely he does it – he masters the world around him and molds it to suit his liking in a way that animals could never do. In fact, one might even argue that the more routinely man engages in these actions, the more his mastery is evident. When man takes the raw material of the world around him and molds it – brings it into higher states of being in accordance with his will – he imitates his Heavenly Creator.

Hashem refrained from *melakhah* on the seventh day. And He deemed the rest which replaced that *melakhah* to be the ultimate meaning of His Creation.

THE REST OF AN ALL-POWERFUL BEING

So why would an All-Powerful God need to rest after creating the world? Was He tired?

I think we are now in a position to answer that question, too.

If God's activity for six days had consisted of mere *avodah*, then the rest that would be demanded would be conventional rest – and yes, it would seem strange that the All-Powerful God needed to rest and “recoup His energy” on the seventh day. But God was not performing *avodah*. He was performing *melakhah*. His activity in those six days was not defined by exertion but by creativity. And creativity demands a different kind of rest entirely.

Rest, in other words, always provides a complement to work. But different types of work call for different kinds of rest. Exertion calls for a kind of rest we call relaxation; lack of exertion helps us become refreshed. But the complement to creativity is not a similar kind of absence. The complement to creativity is, perhaps, the mysterious phenomenon we talked about earlier, the thing we called positive rest.

Creativity is a powerful word. Creation seems so self-sufficient. What else, indeed, does a creator need but to create? But creativity *does* need something else to be complete. It needs *Shabbat*. For in reality, creativity is only a means to an end. Creativity is about bringing something into being. But that's not a final goal. The final goal of creativity is “being” itself.

Positive rest is not something we are all that used to. It seems foreign to us. And perhaps that is only natural, for we live, as it were, in a world of change, a world of becoming. In our world, *melakhah* – changing things, building them, making the world more sophisticated – that's what it is all about. To understand positive rest in all its brilliance, we need to transcend that world, and try and perceive what life might be like in a world not of “becoming,” but of being.

We have a word for a world of being. It's called: *Olam Ha-Ba*, the World to Come. Let's take a break, for a moment, from talking about *Shabbat* – and let's talk briefly about that realm that lies beyond.

IS WORK REALLY WORTH IT?

In the world down here, we all work for a fair part of our lives. But there's something unsettling about this activity we call work.

This fact was made clear to me years ago by a teacher who took particular delight in tormenting us eager students with what might be charitably called healthy servings of philosophical cynicism. He once assigned a particularly difficult paper to my classmates and myself and then, before we started working on it, he posed the following challenge to us. He said, "it's going to take you many hours of work if you want to achieve an A on this paper." And then he said that "if you put in those hours of work, and you hand in a really top-notch draft, and then I decide to give you that A, what would happen next?"

We shrugged. It was an important class, and most of us really wanted that A.

"You'd be ecstatic," he said. "You might jump up and down and run down the hall to call your mother. You'd tell your friends."

"But then what will happen? For how long will you remain excited? An hour? Three hours? A day?"

"Soon, it's going to wear off. You'll get restless. You'll be ready for something new..."

"So ask yourself," he concluded, "maybe it's just not worth it. Why are you bothering to do this?"

In effect, our professor was asking us to make a simple profit-loss analysis: If you spend sixty hours working on a paper and you get only two or three hours of satisfaction from your grade afterwards, well, why bother? It doesn't seem to add up.

Now, don't get me wrong. The professor was not trying to convince us that we should get lazy on our papers. What he was really trying to do was help us clarify our goals.

CLARIFYING GOALS

If we told ourselves that the goal of our work was *the satisfaction we would receive in the end*, well then, he would argue, we were just fooling ourselves. That kind of satisfaction is very fleeting. It evaporates after a couple of hours or a couple of days.

Rather, he was suggesting, the work was only worth it, if we

saw it as satisfying in and of itself. The *process* of writing that paper, of struggling to meet the challenge, had to be seen as its own reward. If we couldn't take pride in that process, if we couldn't see the process itself as valuable, then we might as well just forget it.

A TROUBLING CONCLUSION

But the professor's point, while it might ring true, is unsettling. It's not so bad, maybe, when the only thing at stake is your college paper. But when you apply his logic outside the classroom, to life in the real world, things start to look a little depressing. For just about anything worthwhile we do in life requires work, and if we make a similar profit-loss analysis about the meaning of *any* work, we will reach similar conclusions.

In other words, say you're toiling away on a five-month project your boss assigns you, or that you are spending years writing a book. You invest seemingly countless hours in your labors. How much satisfaction will you possibly get at the end?

Enough to justify your weeks or months of toil? Not likely.

A friend I know worked tirelessly writing a book for the better part of three years. When it was finally published, his wife threw him a surprise party and invited the neighborhood. He was thrilled with the feeling of completion. But his thrill faded after a matter of days. He was restless, and his recent success was no comfort. He related to me that in the years since finishing the work, he almost never went back to crack open the binding of the book he wrote. That chapter in his life was filed away. It was time to move on.

There's something depressing about this. All of life's successes seem to fade so quickly. No feeling of satisfaction or well-being ever lasts very long. Yes, you can take pride in the process. You can see the act of writing as its own reward. That's all very nice. But if what we did was truly worthwhile, why can't we hold onto the pleasure of actually achieving our goal, as well? Why must the satisfaction of success be so fleeting?

The more successful one gets, the more one is troubled by this problem. One of the most successful men in Jewish history was terribly troubled by this problem; he wrote an entire book recounting how he was haunted by it. That book, canonized as part of the *Tanakh*, is known as *Kohelet*. In *Kohelet*, *Shelomo Ha-Melekh* pours out his frustration at a

world that won't let any mark of success stand for very long at all. The world is constantly in motion, constantly changing. Nothing – not the fact of success, nor our pleasure in the face of it – endures long enough to be ultimately satisfying.

I think the phenomenon that the Torah calls the *Shabbat* is meant, in part, to address this problem. *Shabbat*, in a way, is designed to provide an antidote to the boredom of success. And this, perhaps, may provide a key to our puzzle. The *Midrash* tells us that *Shabbat* is “*me'ein Olam Ha-Ba*” – “a taste of the World to Come.” The phrase rolls off our lips easily; it's something most of us have been taught since childhood. But what does it really mean? What fundamental similarity does *Olam Ha-Ba* have with the phenomenon we know as *Shabbat*?

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE IN HEAVEN?

The answer is the world's best-kept secret. Billions of people before us have died, but no one has yet come back with an eyewitness report of what things look like from the other side. Be that as it may, our *mesorah* assures us that it's all worth it and that the reward of the righteous in the hereafter is something we ought to be looking forward to. *Tzaddikim*, we are told, live onwards in a state of eternal bliss.

But here's the problem: Eternity is a pretty long time. For just how long do you think eternal bliss remains satisfying? Wouldn't bliss get kind of boring after a while?

Imagine you really enjoyed cruises, and someone offered you a free cruise to Alaska with five-star dining, a deck-side luxury cabin, the works. For how long do you think you might enjoy such a cruise?

Two weeks? A month. What about six months?

And what if the cruise lasted for eternity? How many times could you see the same icebergs and watch the same penguins? At some point, it would stop seeming like a vacation and it would start seeming laborious. At some point, it would seem like the very opposite of Heaven.

So if Heaven's eternal bliss really lasts for an eternity, why doesn't it get boring? Why in Heaven do we look forward to Heaven?

THE PROBLEM WITH REST; THE PROBLEM WITH WORK

This problem is related to the same question we raised about our work in *this* world. Hundreds of hours of work don't seem justified by a fleeting few hours of reward. But, as we've just seen, the idea of "reward" is just as problematic as the idea of "work." The notion of eternal reward seems downright boring. Neither work, nor reward, seem all that satisfying in the long run. What's the way out of this pickle?

The answer, I think, requires us to look more closely at the nature of life, that is, in This World and life in the hereafter, life in the Next World. What, really, is the difference between these two worlds?

Judaism's answer is that This World is a world of *becoming*, and the Next World is a world of *being*. The next world is a "*yom she-kulo Shabbat*," as it were – a day that is all *Shabbat*. What does this really mean?

In creating the world, *Hashem* split our experience into two realms. The first realm, the world we live in, we might call a "World of Becoming." In this world, the only real lasting satisfaction that we can derive comes from the process of work itself – through building the world around us, indeed, through building ourselves. While we are in this world, we find that constructive engagement is the only "satisfying" reward we can really hope for. Vacations, while nice once in a while, eventually get boring. And the reason is simple: It is because this world was wired for labor, not for the enjoyment of the fruits of that labor. Yes, we can experience fleeting satisfaction when we complete a task, but then it's on to the next thing, or we quickly become bored.

There is, however, another realm. There is the Next World, a World of Being. The World of Being is wired not for work, but for the appreciation of our labors. All that we have accomplished, all the relationships that we worked so hard to cultivate in This World – we experience them for what they truly are in the Next World.

A TASTE OF THE WORLD TO COME

If you think about it, things *had* to be this way. Imagine, for a moment, that the Almighty allowed us to truly experience the fruits of our labors in This World. Imagine that we could truly appreciate, in an enduring way, the satisfaction that comes from a hard-won achievement. Imagine that in this world, we could fully and forever taste the rich, spiritual joy

that is the natural consequence of potential fulfilled. What would happen in such a world? You'd work at one thing, you'd achieve it, and then you'd spend the rest of your life reveling in your success. You'd never accomplish anything again. That wasn't what the Almighty had in mind. He was after something more productive than that.

We can now see why the idea of reward, the lasting enjoyment of any accomplishment, is so hard to come by in this world. Indeed, even the thought of an eternity of enjoyment seems boring to us; something we would want to avoid. Why? Because we are looking at it through the wrong lenses – through the lenses of This World, a world wired for becoming, not being. When we actually experience this “reward,” though, we will ultimately experience it through different lenses – the lenses of the Next World; a world where working to become more is impossible, a world that is hard-wired just for being. When we experience the fruition of our work in the Next World, we will do so within a world that allows us to truly tap into the timeless essence of this treasure.

So, while it may seem depressing that in This World, we can't really take much lasting pleasure in accomplishment, we *do* have a consolation prize. We have *Shabbat*, a little taste of being, right smack in this World of Becoming.

Shabbat is not your average, run of the mill, day of rest. Remember: *Halakhah* permits you to *shlep* heavy tables up flights of stairs on *Shabbat*, but it forbids you to strike a match or gently plow the earth. The latter violates the sense of rest that *Shabbat* demands, while the former, although tiring, does not. Why? Because the *Shabbat* is not really about the kind of rest which helps you catch your breath. Instead, it is about a kind of rest that even the Master of the Universe would need. The kind of rest that is not a *break* from work, but is the very purpose of work; it is “being,” in all its glory. It is the kind of rest we might call, in the words of our Friday night *tefillah*, “*takhlit shamayim va-aretz*” – the very purpose of Creation itself.

Indeed, it is this kind of rest that saves creativity from death at its own hands.

THE DEATH OF CREATIVITY

The act of creating, when you get right down to thinking about it, is seductive. It can perpetuate itself indefinitely. And when it does so, it will, eventually, kill itself.

The examples are everywhere. The artist who always has one more brushstroke to add; the editor who needs to rearrange sentences one last time; the parent who has one last admonition to give a child who is no longer listening anymore. All of these are acts of creation gone bad. When the process of *melakhah*, of improvement, never ends, it destroys itself. At some point, a creator needs to let go. Paradoxically, the final act of creating is ceasing to create.

A creator finds it hard to let go, because that seems like the end. Letting go engenders a natural sense of mourning. But perhaps, like death itself, it is really just the beginning; it is really just a transition from a world of “becoming” into a world of “being.” When a creator stops creating, he is finally ready to realize the purpose of his labors. He is finally ready to let the thing be what it is, and to relate to that which he created.

That’s what positive rest means. Positive rest doesn’t mean stopping to catch your breath. It means stopping to tinker, and beginning to appreciate. It means letting a thing just be, and appreciating it *for what it is in itself*, not for what you can still try and make it into.

This type of rest was inaugurated into the world on the first *Shabbat*, the seventh day of Creation. As the sixth day came to a close, the Almighty made a conscious, fateful decision to stop tinkering with the Universe. He looked at His handiwork and declared: “*hineh tov me’od*” – “indeed, it is very good.” This proclamation signaled *Hashem*’s willingness to stop making the Universe better, to stop fixing it, and to begin the process of relating to it for what it was.

The Almighty stopped not because the work was over. The work of improvement is never over. But He pulled back and left that work in our hands, in the hands of mankind. It was now up to us to pick up the mantle of *melakhah* – to become earthly creators, to “guard the world and to work it,” to leave to the next generation a world better than the world we were given.

Hashem, in His benevolence, decided to share with the earthly creators the gift of *Shabbat*. Through it, man learns to emulate His Cre-

ator, and to crown creativity with rest. Living as we do in This World, a world wired for work, it is tempting to overlook the importance of *Shabbat*. It is tempting to let *melakhah* trick us into thinking that there is nothing more to life. But if we fall into that trap, we will never really create anything. In the act of resting from *melakhah*, we rest from the process of trying to shape the world around us to suit our needs. In this letting go, we are finally able to appreciate the world for what it is, not just for what it can do for us. On *Shabbat*, we escape the relentless need to keep on tinkering, and we taste the deliciousness of pure being.

And it's not just the world that we learn to appreciate through rest; it's the people in that world as well. We all have our top five ways we would like to change our spouse to suit our needs. And most of us, in at least subtle ways, try to make these wishes known as gently as possible, of course. But as long as you are in the process of tinkering, trying to improve him or her, you are not in the process of appreciating. To let go is to make a powerful statement: that I love you, that I appreciate you – right now, for the person who you are now – not just for what I might make you into in the future.

Hashem gave us a sliver of time, *Shabbat*, to help us make this stance a regular feature of our lives. If and when we do, we will have truly bought ourselves a piece of Heaven on Earth.