

Shabbat - G-d's Day to ReJEWvinate

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Parshat Mishpatim repeats the Mitzva of Shabbat which was already stated in the Ten Commandments. "Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day, you shall rest..." (Sh'mot 23:12).

In the division of the Torah into chapters and verses, the account of Shabbat in the Creation story, in B'reishit, comes at the beginning of Chapter 2. The Abarbanel informs us, that this division of the Bible into different chapters, is NOT of Jewish origin. These chapter divisions were invented by the Medieval Christian Bible printers. We use them for convenience only.

By beginning a new chapter with the Shabbat, the significance of Shabbat as the climax and end product of Creation is undermined. Shabbat is the culmination of the entire Creation process, and the verses dealing with it at the beginning of B'reishit 2 should in reality conclude Chapter 1. Because the Shabbat "rest" was NOT something totally passive, just the absence of work. Shabbat rest was rather itself a proactive act. As Rashi says, "On the completion of the sixth day, the world still lacked rest, by making the Seventh Day a Day of Rest, G-d completed His Creation." Thus the verse states, "He finished and

completed His work on the Seventh Day" (B'reishit 2:2).

Of the Mitzva of Shabbat the Torah says, "In six days G-d made Heaven and Earth, and on the Seventh Day He ceased from work, and was refreshed" (Sh'mot 31:17). The Hebrew word VAYINAFASH "He was refreshed", is connected to the noun NEFESH, which means a soul.

What does the Torah mean, "that G-d was refreshed" and "that He rested"? Yishayahu in 40:28 states, "Do you not know... that G-d does NOT get tired or weary?" So why does G-d need to "rest" and be "refreshed"? It is only for our benefit! If G-d would not have set the example by creating the concept of rest, by resting Himself, we could NOT experience the sweet, peaceful, rest, relaxation, and re-JEWvination of the wonderful Shabbat.

On the Seventh Day, G-d experienced His Soul (as it were) and the function of Shabbat is to allow us to experience and appreciate our soul as well. Thus, the Talmud states that on Shabbat we receive an "additional" soul, which is an extra bonus of G-d's Holy Presence.

Therefore, throughout our long and bitter exile, the Jew lived from Shabbat to Shabbat. When I was growing up in Brooklyn, there was a popular bumper sticker which read, "Hang in there, Shabbat is coming!" As the popular saying goes, "More than the Jew keep Shabbat, Shabbat keeps the Jew". 🕯