

Guest article
by Rabbi David Walk

TEMPLE IN TIME

There are widely disparate attitudes to time. Those with a more cavalier attitude find schedules and appointments mere suggestions, while there are others with a more punctilious approach who serve their time pieces as ruthless masters over their lives. Modern devices are geared to option #2. Our digital watches and smart phones are amazingly accurate. In the world of halacha, there is a movement towards ever more exacting standards, listing times down to tenths of seconds. For example, when is sh'ki'a (sunset)? This Friday night in Jerusalem the sun sets at 5:42:30pm. But what happens at that instant? I don't know. In the US, most people use the data from the Naval Observatory in Washington (Where Mike Pence lives). They say sunset is when the sun is exactly half way down. I'd prefer to know when the last ray of sun disappears, and for sunrise I'd prefer that very first sparkle of light over the horizon. I'd like to think that in these issues, close enough should be fine, like horse shoes. My wife and I live in Jerusalem at the north east corner of Baka on Derech Chevron. Across from us we can see the St. Clair Monastery. I'm very curious about what goes on behind those forbidding walls. All day long they ring bells around the turning of each hour. It can be a few minutes before the hour or a few after. But the brothers only do it during daylight hours. I'd like to think they're

going by a sundial. Ahh, for simpler times.

Time is on my mind this week, because some remarkable assertions about time are presented at the beginning of this week's double parsha: Moshe called the whole community of the children of Israel to assemble, and he said to them: ...Six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have sanctity, a day of complete rest to the Lord (Sh'mot 35:1-2). It's very rare that the entire nation is called together, so this must be of great importance. But what's the message? Don't work on Shabbat. Hadn't they already gotten that memo at the foot of Mt. Sinai? What's being added that makes this announcement so very special? Well, it's got to be the context, which is about the final push to build the Mishkan. The very next line after the warning about Shabbat is: This is the word that the Lord has commanded to say: Take from yourselves an offering for the Lord; every generous hearted person shall bring it, as the Lord's offering... and make... the Mishkan (verses 4-5, 10-11). Conclusion: There's a connection between Shabbat the Mikdash.

But what is the relationship between Shabbat and this holy building? The most famous answer is that even though once the building has been erected, the kohanim can bring sacrifices and do many otherwise Shabbat-prohibited acts, it cannot be built on Shabbat. Okay, but let's see if we can find something a bit meatier.

Over the past few years, Koren

Publishers and the OU have collaborated on some wonderful publications. Two of my favorites are the Koren Siddur with a commentary by Rav Jonathan Sacks and the Koren Mesoret Harav Siddur, which collected many inspiring comments on the Siddur by Rav Soloveitchik. They both contain enlightening and very different ideas on this topic. The comments are on that remarkable poem which combines a discussion of both topics, namely Licha Dodi (Rav Shlomo Alkabetz, mid-1500s).

After asking Shabbat to come to us as our beloved, in stanza three we say: 'Mikdash of the King in the royal city'. This begins a five-stanza discussion about rebuilding the Temple. What's it doing here? Rav Sacks writes: The poet speaks of the desolate condition of Jerusalem and the Jewish people... summoning them to shake of their grief rouse themselves to new glory (p.319-320). We spend Shabbat contemplating the future splendor of our Temple and our nation. Since the great mystics of Tzfat in the sixteenth century (of whom Rav Alkabetz was one), called Shabbat mei'ain olam haba (a sample of the World to Come), why not invest effort in anticipating and dreaming about that future reality in rebuilt Jerusalem?

Rav Soloveitchik doesn't see it that way at all. The discussion of Shabbat and the Mikdash in our parsha and in our poem is logical and reasonable. They must be considered together because of their commonality. The Rav wrote: Conceptually, the Holy Temple and the Shabbat are similar; they facilitate an

encounter with God. The difference lies only in dimension - space or time... The Jew who accepts Shabbat, finds himself in the same position as the Jew who entered the Temple Sanctuary long ago... The Temple is the place where God resides, and the Jew visits - on Shabbat... God pays us a visit (p.354-355).

This brings me back to the point I was discussing at the beginning of this article. How do we determine times in Judaism? Do we get into this frenzy for hyper accuracy? I'd like to think not. Too many people spend Friday afternoon trying to figure out exactly how much time they have until Shabbat. The Rav believes that misses the point. Friday afternoon should be a special time of anticipation for an amazing event which should never get stale. The Master of the Universe is coming to visit. The Rav wrote that a polite person goes out to greet the Sh'china (the Divine Presence, Thinking Aloud: Sefer Shemos, p.253)). Don't you want to be there in shul before God arrives? You would be if a flesh and blood ruler were coming.

I know that there will be times when things go wrong and we find ourselves rushing to get ready for Shabbat, but that shouldn't be the norm. The default position for Friday afternoon should be tremendous excitement for the approaching rendezvous with our Maker. That shouldn't require a stopwatch. It should require us to be in shul before the Exalted Guest; excitedly anticipating the precious moment.