

“More than the Jew has kept the Shabbos, the Shabbos has kept the Jew”

written by Eliyahu Hecht
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There's an old expression that I never quite understood before I learned Likutey Moharan Tinyana 2 and its associated halacha in Likutey Halachos, and that is “more than the Jew has kept the Shabbos, the Shabbos has kept the Jew”.

I understood how Jews can keep Shabbos, but what I couldn't understand was how it is that the Shabbos keeps the Jew. How does refraining from melacha, creative activity, and performing various Shabbos practices, such as making kiddush, lighting Shabbos candles and eating three meals, keep the Jewish soul alive? Is it the family time, the downtime or the time we now can spend learning Torah? Is it that Shabbos creates Jewish awareness, identity and pride? Is that enough to do it? I always felt there had to be more.

The week is essentially divided into two parts, six days of work and one day of rest. But both parts surprisingly have

the same objective, albeit attainable through different mechanisms – to reveal the Oneness of Hashem in this world.

The six days of work are a reality of multiplicity. We interact with the vast diversity of the world using many tools and processes, or melachos, to earn a livelihood and achieve our goals. When we do so according to the guidelines of the Torah, we elevate our experience from mundane to holy by uncovering Hashem's Oneness wherever we are and whatever it is we're doing. It takes a lot of work to accomplish this in a spiritually inhospitable environment where most around us do not share this value and there are many luring temptations. The challenges to maintaining k'dusha, holiness, are formidable.

On Shabbos, however, we enter a precious, holy realm that is inherently connected to the Achdus HaPashut, Straightforward Oneness, of Hashem. It is a gift from Hashem, wherein He makes Himself wonderfully accessible to us without the need to perform melachos to find Him. Our focus is on His unity, and the various activities we'd performed all week long are obsolete. We celebrate our fusion with Hashem on Shabbos.

By experiencing Hashem's Oneness on Shabbos, our souls become imbued with the desire to remain connected to Him even during the coming workweek. We are invigorated with a fresh sense of mission and are optimistic that Hashem is accessible even now as He had been on Shabbos. As a result, a Jew is always seeking to draw himself closer to Hashem, through whichever timely method, work or rest. It's this relationship with Hashem, epitomized by Shabbos, that has kept the Jew alive throughout history.

(Based on Likutey Halachos, Choshen Mishpat, hilchos shutafim b'karka 2)