



The Gift that Does Not Keep on Giving

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The Tisch: Ohev Yisrael #5

Shabbat is many things. It is both an opportunity and an obligation. It is supposed to be restful but it can often be stressful. It can be relaxing and it can be boring. Shabbat can bring us closer together with our communities, but it can also lead to division and isolation. But the ideal Shabbat, the Shabbat that the Torah envisions and describes is entirely good. This Shabbat is spiritually uplifting and satisfying, uniting us as a people and bringing us closer to God, who is also at rest on this day. In fact, the Talmud has a unique way of describing this entirely positive dimension of Shabbat. According to a story in Massekhet Shabbat, When God teaches Moshe about Shabbat, He describes it as a gift. God says, “I have a good gift in my storehouse and I want to give it to Israel.”

This story is lovely and touching, but also a little confusing. First, why is Shabbat, of all of the *mitzvot* and the rituals of the Torah singled out as being a gift. Certainly all of the *mitzvot* that God gives us are good and for our benefit, why is Shabbat the only *mitzvah* that receives this special designation? Second, Shabbat is not only described as a gift, but also as a **good** gift, a *matanah tovah*. Aren't all gifts supposedly good? What makes Shabbat a gift that is uniquely positive in contrast to other gifts which do not receive this stamp of goodness?



The Ohev Yisrael responds by clarifying that yes, not only the Torah and *mitzvot* and all of the festivals, but everything in the physical world is considered a gift from God. And it behooves us to remember that our existence in and of itself is a Divine gift. However, these gifts come with strings attached. If I'm blessed with wealth, God expects me to share it. If I am blessed with wisdom, God expects me to share it. And even holidays come with obligations—the special *mitzvot* and rituals of the day which need to be performed and the interpersonal obligation to make sure that other members of my community have what they need in order to celebrate the holiday as well. Additionally, all of these gifts from God require human effort. Physical goods comes through exertion and planning and an unapplied intellect is wasted on the person who is gifted with “smarts.” And the holidays themselves require human input in order to fix the calendar and establish the holidays.

Shabbat, however, is different. Shabbat is a gift with no strings attached. We don't declare the holiness of Shabbat and we don't forge the holiness of Shabbat, Shabbat comes without our intervention. And Shabbat's only obligation is to keep Shabbat. There are no additional responsibilities, our goal is to do whatever we can to tap into a holiness that already exists. Because God keeps Shabbat and blesses Shabbat, our responsibility to contribute is minimized. Shabbat's holiness comes from God, not from us. We are obligated to receive and appreciate it, we aren't obligated to make it.

What the Ohev Yisrael teaches us about Shabbat is that we are often focused on the wrong things regarding Shabbat and therefore we find it stressful. We're worried about the weekday work that isn't getting done, we're worried about the guests who are coming or not coming and what they and we will eat, we're worried about how we are going to occupy the time when our normal range of activities is restricted. And many of us are preoccupied with the violations and obligations that are involved in keeping Shabbat. But all of these elements are secondary to what Shabbat truly is and what it requires of us. Shabbat is a time to be sensitized to and tap into holiness. Shabbat is a time to feel together with God. And these



core elements of Shabbat, Shabbat's essence, is untouched by our efforts or lack thereof. We should appreciate that it is God that makes Shabbat holy, not us, and that holiness is guaranteed. Shabbat is an event that we attend, not an event that we make, and we should approach it with a sense of relaxation and security. Yes, some of the details of our attendance need to be worked out by us, but Shabbat itself happens without us. The real work is already done. Our job is to show up, enjoy and appreciate.

This is a teaching about Shabbat and its holiness, but it's also a teaching about gifts in general and what makes a gift truly good.

First, the Ohev Yisrael teaches us to be sensitive to the obligations entailed by the gifts that we receive. We are the custodians of our gifts and we are also responsible to use them generously and wisely. They are not ours to waste. Secondly, when we find ourselves in a position to give, we should consider giving good gifts, gifts that don't obligate and which don't require anything in return. We should strive not to expect what we give to be used in a specific way or to be reciprocated at a certain point. Having these expectations doesn't invalidate the gift, but perhaps minimizes its goodness. Rather than contenting ourselves with the fact that we give, let's try to give better.

Ohev Yisrael - Ki Tisa	אוהב ישראל, כי תשא
The Holy Blessed One said... I have a good gift... One can explain in a different manner: For ostensibly isn't everything that God gives to Israel good and desirable gifts?! This applies both to physical things like sustenance, great abundance, and expensive wealth as well as spiritual things - that is the intelligence and	עוד בגמ' שבת הנ"ל. אמר הקב"ה וגו' מתנה טובה יש לי וגו'. י"ל קצת באופן אחר. דלכאורה הלא כל שנותן הש"י לישראל הכל המה מתנות טובות וחמודות הן דברים גשמיים כגון פרנסה ושפע רב והון יקר. וכן



smarts to study Torah. And the performance of *mitzvot* and the declaration of the holidays and festivals [as times of] gladness and rejoicing that HaShem our God has given to us. They are all a present from God which gladden the hearts of the Jewish people have merited to receive this gift. And if so, why is the Holy Shabbat in specific called a good gift and nothing else?!

However, one can say that all of the gifts that God has endowed human beings are all gifts on the condition that they be returned. For example: if God gives a person abundant sustenance and great wealth, then he is commanded and obligated to give *tzedakah* and to do kindness with his money. And if he has intelligence and smarts he is obligated to labor in Torah and *mitzvot*. And also on holidays and [special] times we need to engage in the *mitzvot* that are connected to them and performed on them. And through our engagement with [these *mitzvot*] and our prayers we bring holiness and unifications to the holy upper worlds. As our sages said: Israel are the ones who sanctify the [special] times. And through this we also draw down from above good bounty to the congregation of Israel below. And this is all through the mechanism of direct light and returning light.

But the *mitzvah* of the holy Shabbat is really an exclusively good gift that Blessed God has given us, with no condition that it be returned. Because on Shabbat

דברים רוחניים היינו שכל ומדע
ללימוד התורה ועשיית מצותיו
וקריאת חגים ומועדים לששון ולשמח
האשר נתן ה' אלהינו אלינו. כולם
מתת ה' הוא. המשמחים לבבות בני
אישי הישראלי אשר זכו למתנה
זאת. וא"כ למה דוקא נק' שבת
קודש מתנה טובה ולא זולת.
אמנם י"ל כי כל המתנות אשר זיכה
ה' את בני האדם כולם המה מתנה
ע"מ להחזיר. עד"מ אם יתן ה' לאדם
שפע פרנסה ועושר גדול אז הוא
מצווה ומחויב ליתן צדקה ולעשות
בממונו ג"ח. וכן אם יש לו שכל ומדע
מחויב להיות עמל בתורה ומצות.
וגם בחגים וזמנים צריכין אנו לעסוק
בהמצות השייכים אליהם ובהם. וע"י
עסקינו בהם וע"י תפלתנו אנו
ממשיכין קדושה ויחודים לעולמות
עליונים הקדושים. וכמחז"ל ישראל
אינהו דאקדשינהו להזמנים. ועי"ז
אנו ממשיכין מלמעלה ג"כ השפעות
טובות להכנ"י לתתא. והכל הוא
בבחי' אור ישר ואור חוזר.
אך מצות שבת קודש הוא באמת רק
מתנה טובה שנתן לנו הש"י שלא על
מנת להחזיר. כי בש"ק יש עלייה



there is an ascent for all of the holy worlds and they are unified and connected and they receive from one another all of the good bounty, all goodness and joy, the upper lights and the good lamps. And this is done also without the engagement of our service and our prayers. Rather through our service and prayers we draw down and receive the holiness and the good influence and all of the blessings from the holiness of Shabbat—from the holy upper worlds to the congregation of Israel below. **This** is definitely a good and desirable gift. And there is no comparison to it. And it is all on account of the greatness and the strength of God's love and the pleasant affection that He has for the children of Israel, and the lofty place that he has raised his Holy people to. Understand this well.

לכל העולמות הק' ומתייחדין ומתקשרין. ומקבלין דין מן דין השפעות טובות וכל טיבו וחדו ונהורין עילאין קדישין וכל בוצינן טבין. וזהו נעשה גם בלתי עסק עבודתינו ותפלתינו רק ע"י עבודתינו ותפלתינו אנו ממשיכין ומקבלין קדושה והשפעות טובות וכל ברכאין מקדושת ש"ק מעולמות עליונים קדישין להכנ"י לתתא. וזהו ודאי מתנה טובה וחמודה. אין ערוך אליה. והכל הוא לגודל עוצם אהבתו ית' ונועם חיבתו לזרע ישראל והרוממות שרמם עם קדושו. והבן היטב:

