

Are We Obsessed with Work?

Exodus, Chapter 35

1. Moses called the whole community of the children of Israel to assemble, and he said to them: "These are the things that the L-rd commanded to make.

2. Six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have sanctity, a day of complete rest to the L-rd; whoever performs work thereon [on this day] shall be put to death.

3. You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwelling places on the Sabbath day."

4. And Moses spoke to the entire community of the children of Israel, saying: "This is the word that the L-rd has commanded to say:

5. "Take from yourselves an offering for the L-rd; every generous hearted person shall bring it, [namely] the L-rd's offering: gold, silver, and copper..."

Commentaries:

Moses called... to assemble: Heb. ויקהל.

Rashi

He assembled them on the day after Yom Kippur, when he came down from the mountain.

Six days work may be done

Mechilta

Elsewhere it is written, "six days you shall work." When Israel obeys the will of the Omnipresent their work shall be done (tei'aseh) by others, when they do not obey His will, they will do their work on their own.

For you shall eat the labor of your hands; happy shall you be, and it shall be well with you. (Psalms 128:2)

Likkutei Torah

Toiling to provide physical needs ("when you eat") should involve only the hands and other external limbs. The head and heart, however, must be involved in Torah and mitzvot. When following this procedure of "eating the toil of your hands" then "you will be happy and it shall be well with you" as our sages said, "you are happy in this world and it shall be well with you in the world to come." (Avot 4:1)

And the L-rd your G-d shall bless you in all that you do (Deut 15:19)

Lekach Tov

I might think that the blessing will come even when man is idle, scripture therefore says, "in all that you do."

Zohar 1:88a

There is not stirring above until there is a stirring below. The blessings from above are to be found only where there is some substance and not mere emptiness.

Ohr Chaim 35:1

Shabbat is as important as the entire Torah and this mitzvah rectifies a mistake against the entire Torah.

פרק לה

א. ויקהל משה את

כל עדת בני ישראל

ויאמר אליהם אלה הדברים אשר צוה ה' לעשות

אתם: ב. ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה וביום השביעי

יהיה לכם קדש שבת שבתוך לה' כל העשה בו

מלאכה יומת: ג. לא תבערו אש בכל משבתים

ביום השבת: ד. ויאמר משה אל כל עדת בני

ישראל לאמר זה הדבר אשר צוה ה' לאמר:

ה. קחו מאתכם תרומה לה' כל נדיב לבו יביאה

את תרומת ה' זהב וכסף ונחשת:



With this mitzvah, the mistakes and blemishes of the Jewish people will be rectified. This explains why it repeats the mitzvah of Shabbat (from the Ten Commandments) and also why it repeats it by the building of the tabernacle. This was commanded by G-d to rectify what they did in the past so that He could dwell amongst them. This mitzvah of Shabbat which is as important as the entire Torah would rectify the sin of idol worship, as it says, whoever keeps Shabbat according to its laws even an idol worshipper is forgiven.

Maimonides, Laws of Idolatry 1:1

In the days of Enoch, the people erred a terrible error and the leaders of that generation were misguided and Enoch himself was from those who erred. This was their mistake. They said that since G-d created the stars and the planets through which the world is guided and placed them in the heavens and He allotted them respect and they served before Him, therefore it is appropriate to give them praise and respect. This is the will of G-d to honor and glorify those who He Himself has given honor. This is similar to a king who wants those who are his misters to be given respect and by respecting them one shows respect to the king. When that generation realized this, they began to build temples and offered sacrifices to the heavenly bodies and to praise and glorify them and to bow towards them in order to appease the will of G-d in their distorted minds. This was the essence of idol worship in those days, not to claim that the heavenly bodies are actually divine.

Six days you shall labor, and do all your work Ex. 20:9

Mechilta

On the Shabbat, a person should regard himself as if all his work were complete.

Shabbat Shabbaton, a day of complete rest to the L-rd

Chassidic Masters

If, however, during the six days a person had been preoccupied with material concerns, on the seventh day anxieties will invade him; even if his body ceases work, his mind will not be at rest. On the other hand, if he has given his work its proper place during the week, the light of Shabbat will illuminate him, and it will be shabbat shabbaton—a Shabbat twice over. For Shabbat will then permeate his whole week, and when the day itself arrives it will have a double sanctity.

SUMMARY

- Man is not sustained by his own efforts, but through G-d's blessing.
- Our work merely provides a natural channel for the divine blessing of sustenance. We need to remember that it is no more than a channel.
- Excessive preoccupation with the material world is a form of idolatry. It involves the error of attaching significance to what is no more than a vessel or channel of Divine blessing.
- When we give work the right priority in our lives by following six days of passive work in the sense of mental detachment and the realization that human work is only an instrument of G-d, we can experience a "sabbath of sabbaths" that focuses utterly on the source of our blessings.
- Do you define yourself by what you do or who you are?

