

2

וַיִּכְלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ
וְכָל-צְבָאָם:

1 And the heavens and the earth were finished
and all their hosts.

The Talmud states that "sleep is one-sixtieth of death."⁴⁸ But if sleep is a form of death, then the reverse also applies—death is a form of sleep. Just as sleep is the means by which both body and soul renew their vigor for the coming day, so, too—and in a greater and more fundamental way—death is a "descent for the sake of ascent," a retraction of the arrow of life so that it can be impelled forward with redoubled force in the World to Come.

- THE REBBE

"Good" is the inclination for good. "Very good" is the evil inclination.

How so? For were it not for the evil inclination and the jealousy a man has of his fellow, a person would not build a house, nor marry, nor beget children.

- MIDRASH RABBAH

At the king's palace, outside, was a harlot, beautiful of visage and form. One day, the king said to her, "Go and attempt to seduce my son, for I wish to see the extent of my son's love for me." So the harlot pursued the prince and began to embrace him and kiss him and to beguile him with all sorts of enticements. If the king's son is virtuous and obeys the commandments of his father, he will reject her and drive her away. Then the father rejoices in his son, and invites him into his royal chambers, and bestows precious gifts and great honors on him.

Now, who is the cause of the great reward of the prince? Why, the harlot! Thus it is said: "very good"—this is the evil inclination.

- ZOHAR

R. Naftali of Ropshitz once rebuked one of his children over some childish prank. When the child defended his behavior by blaming his yetzer ha-ra ("evil inclination"), his father said, "On the contrary, you should learn from your evil inclination. He is doing exactly what God told him to do—to test your strength to resist him. So you, too, should do what God wants you to do."

"That's not a fair comparison," responded the child. "My evil inclination doesn't have an evil inclination convincing him not to do his job."

- SIPUREI CHASIDIM

⁴⁸ Sleep, too, was introduced on the Sixth Day, as per 2:21.

Up until man, all creations are deemed "good," as they all belong to the natural order and harmoniously complement each other. Man, however, is of an entirely different order of existence: a "veryness," indeed a "too much-ness," that introduces the potential for great achievement, but also death and destruction.

- R. MOSHE TEITELBAUM OF UJHEL

Basic righteousness is "good." But when one sins and corrects one's wrongdoing through *teshuvah*,⁴⁹ "sins are transformed into merits." Only at the close of the sixth day, after man had sinned and repented his sin,⁵⁰ could creation be described as "very good."

- R. ZADOK OF LUBLIN

"The sixth day"

Why does it say "the sixth day"?⁵¹ This is a reference to the 6th of Sivan—the day of the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai—as it was not until that day that the world truly existed.

For God stipulated a condition with the work of creation: If the people of Israel accept the Torah, you will exist; if not, you shall revert to desolation and emptiness.

- TALMUD; RASHI

The six days of creation embody the whole of history. For the world shall exist for six thousand years, and the events of each millennium mirror the works of its corresponding day in the six days of creation.⁵² Thus it is said, "God's day is a thousand years."

- NACHMANIDES

The number associated with each of the six days also denotes the nature of its creations. The day on which light was created is called "one day," for light exemplifies the unity of creation with its source. Day two brought the creation of plurality and divisiveness. On day three the character of the earth was formed

⁴⁹ Literally, "return" or repentance from sin. On its highest level, *teshuvah* is the process by which a negative deed or state is retroactively transformed into a positive force, when a person channels his anguish and regret into a striving for good more powerful than what an unblemished goodness can produce. See *The Snake in the Garden* on pages 5-6.

⁵⁰ According to the *Talmud*, the entire incident of the Tree of Knowledge—recounted in 3:1-24—occurred on the very day Adam and Eve were created, on the sixth day of creation. See citation on page 46.

⁵¹ In contrast to the other five days, where it says "one day," "a second day," etc.

⁵² See fig. 15 on pages 70-71.

NOTES

2:1

FINISHED (וַיִּכְלּוּ ~ va'yechulu) also • **completed, perfected** -R. Yehoshua ben Levi in *Midrash Rabbah*; *Onkelos*; *Saadia Gaon*; *Abarbanel* • **ended, made finite** -*Midrash Rabbah*; *Yefeh Tolar* • **included, sublimated** -*Zohar*; *Shaloh*; *Sefath Emeth* • **yearned, desired** -*Targum Yerushalmi*; *Zohar*; *Ralbag*; *Tur*; *Ohr ha-Chayim* • **annihilated** -R. Aphas in *Midrash Rabbah* • **became a vessel** -R. Chama in *Midrash Rabbah* • **attained their purpose** -R. Abraham Rapa • **empowered** -*Tzemach Tzedek*
THEIR HOSTS (צְבָאָם ~ tzeva'am) also • **their format** (צִיּוֹנוֹם ~ tzivyonam) – see commentary to 1:24 -R. Yehoshua ben Levi in *Talmud* • **their desire and consent** – see commentary to 1:26 -R. Yehoshua ben Levi in *Talmud*; *Rashi*

with its division into three zones—the oceans, habitable land, and wilderness. The creations of day four segment time into fours—the four quarters of the day, the four quarters of the lunar month, and the four seasons of the solar year. The five dimensions of life—growth, sensation, imagination, will and intelligence—are reflected in the creation of living things on day five. And on the sixth day was created the human being, who stands at the axis of creation to exert his influence upon its six sides—right, left, forward, backward, up and down.

- BECHAYEI

2:1

"The heavens and the earth were finished..."

Shabbath is both the end and the beginning of all. All the toil and achievements of the preceding six days feed into Shabbath, where they are uplifted to their source. Then Shabbath generates, nourishes and empowers the days of the following week. And so on, in a perpetual cycle of creation and sublimation.

Come see the supernal secret of this: the six days are all joined at one hidden point. When Shabbath arrives, this point ascends to unite with its source Above, and all the days of

- וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
מְלָאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה
וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
מְכָל-מְלָאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:
וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ
כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מְכָל-מְלָאכְתּוֹ
אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת: פ
- 2 And God finished on the seventh day
his work which he had made;
and he rested on the seventh day
from all his work which he had made.
- 3 And God blessed the seventh day
and he sanctified it;
for in it he rested from all his work
which God created to make.

*God sanctifies
the seventh day as
a day of rest*

the week are subsumed within it and ascend with it.

- ZOHAR; NACHMANIDES
- R. ELIYAHU DE VIDAS; SHALOH

Any sphere, great or small, is defined by the point at its center. Whatever the distance from the center point to the surface of the sphere, six times that measure will be the circumference of the sphere.

Envision the entirety of creation as a sphere. Shabbath is the point at the center of the sphere, the core of holiness and purpose that defines it; and the six days of the week are the six segments emanating from it in six directions to form the area of the sphere.

- R. YOSEF GIKATILLA

This is the deeper explanation for the law cited in the Talmud, that if a person is traveling in the wilderness and has lost track of when Shabbath occurs, "he should count six days and sanctify the seventh." Although the true, universal Shabbath is fixed in time, a person can nevertheless create something of the holiness of Shabbat in his own subjective seventh day, because every day has a point of Shabbath in it.⁵³

- CORDOVERO

The midrash relates:

Shabbath said to God: "Master of the universe! Each day has a mate, but I have none."

Said God to her: "The community of Israel is your mate."

So when the people of Israel stood before Mount Sinai, God said to them: "Remember the Sabbath day, to sanctify it."

Meaning: Each segment of the sphere has a facing segment as its mate—the first day corresponds to the fourth day, the second day to

⁵³ The same applies to the relationship between the six "workday" millennia of history, and the "day that is wholly Shabbath"—the World to Come. Even as we traverse the wilderness of the temporal world, we can connect to the core of holiness that is its essence and purpose. -R. Eliyahu de Vidas

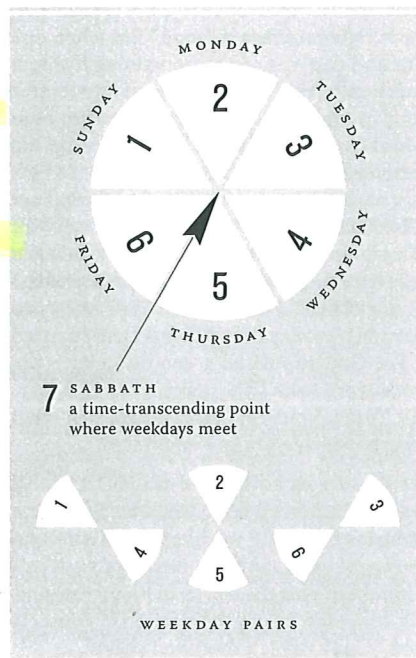


fig. 8: THE SPHERE OF TIME

the fifth day, and the third day to the sixth day (see fig. 8).⁵⁴ But Shabbath is a singular point without any surfaces or volume, and as such has no parallel among the days of creation. Indeed, because it possesses no "space" of its own, it can serve as the point of origin, unity and consummation of the six areas.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *Midrash Rabbah* pairs Sunday with Monday, Tuesday with Wednesday, and Thursday with Friday. *Shaloh*, however, matches them as they face each other across the circle of time—a correspondence also seen in the creations of these days: light on the 1st day, and the sun and moon on the 4th; water and sky on the 2nd day, and fish and birds on the 5th; earth and plants on the 3rd day, and land animals and man on the 6th.

⁵⁵ If even the smallest quantity of area or volume is imparted to the center point, the unity of the six segments would be disrupted and the integrity of the sphere would be destroyed. This is the deeper

Sabbath's mate is the community of Israel, who infuse holiness into the world below as she infuses it above: what Shabbath is to the six "days" or attributes of creation, the Jew is to the physical world.

- SHALOH

"Were finished"

Instead of "were finished" (וַיְכַל ~ va'yechulu), read this word as "they finished" (וַיְכַלּוּ ~ va'ye-chalu). Because when a person prays on the eve of the Shabbath and recites the verses of *Va'yechulu*, it is as if he became a partner with God in creation.⁵⁶

- R. HAMNUNA
IN TALMUD

Creation is God speaking the world into existence. Man, too, creates reality with speech: by attesting to a certain truth, we make it a known and veritable reality. Hence the equivalency and "partnership" with God we achieve when we testify to the divine work of creation.

- MAHARSHA

God creates "something from nothing," imparting realness and substantiality to the material world. Man creates "nothing from something" by imparting awareness of the divine reality to that very world. This is a true partnership, as the latter change is no less radical than the former.

- TZEMACH TZEDEK

significance of the Hebrew term for the act of doing work on Shabbath, חלול שבת or "profanation of the Shabbath." חלל literally means "hollow," and שבת means both Shabbath and week. So that the term חלול שבת also implies to "make the week hollow" and "make the week a corpse" (another meaning of חלל). When Shabbath is treated as an ordinary workday and given material "body," the point of spirituality and purpose at the center of the sphere is destroyed and the week is emptied of its soul.

⁵⁶ Verses 2:1-3 ("And the heavens and the earth were finished... which God created to make") are recited on Friday night as a preamble to the *kiddush* and during the evening service. This act of testimony encapsulates the essence of our weekly observance of Shabbath, which is to instill in the world the awareness that God is its creator.