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# THE JEWISH VISION OF SPIRITUALITY III

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## Connecting to Spirituality in Time

In the first Morasha class on spirituality we concluded that fundamental to being human is the search for purpose and meaning, and leading a life rich with spirituality. To discover spirituality, we learned that a person needs to be objective in evaluating alternatives, and to be prepared to accept the conclusions of his exploration.

Jewish spirituality was loosely defined as the development and strengthening of an eternal relationship with God.

We learned further that Jewish spirituality is absolutely comprehensive; meaning everything we do is seen as an opportunity for spiritual growth, based on Torah study and mitzvot. It is within this framework that we can reach our personal and collective missions in life. In the second Morasha class we saw that spirituality is expressed by man through mitzvot in three spheres: *bein adam l'Makom* (between man and God), *bein adam l'atzmo* (personal growth), and *bein adam l'chavero* (concern for others and interpersonal relationships).

This third class affords an additional perspective on the nature of Jewish spirituality – exploring how we express our spirituality in the dimension of time. Time is viewed as the most precious resource for infusing our lives with Jewish values. Furthermore, we will see how the continuum of *time itself* flows with a dynamic of spiritual meaning, bringing us the special times of Shabbat, festival days and even special weeks, each of which offers diverse opportunities for spiritual expression.

In this class we will address the following questions:

- ☞ What is the Jewish concept of time?
- ☞ Is time only a void, awaiting our “filling,” or does it contain deeper meaning?
- ☞ What makes Shabbat and the festivals more holy than other days?
- ☞ What is the difference between Shabbat and festival days?
- ☞ Why are many mitzvot time-related?

## Class Outline

- Section I. The Nature of Time
- Section II. Shabbat – Recognizing and Enjoying the Goals of Life
- Section III. The Festivals – Meetings with our Maker
- Section IV. Rabbinic Commemorations: Purim, Chanukah & The Three Weeks
- Section V. Maximizing the Moment

## SPIRITUALITY IN TIME

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Time is viewed as our most precious resource – it enables us to infuse life with Jewish values. God created time to allow change in the world, which is the platform for us to use our free will and build a relationship with God (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto). Otherwise life would be static. It is time that intrinsically gives immediacy to life and enables our free will decisions to have a consequence and impact. For whatever I choose to do at any given moment determines my character, and reflects my aspirations, ethics and spirituality. Moreover, time itself follows a dynamic Jewish calendar containing cycles of weekdays, Shabbat, festival days and even weeks that are imbued with vast holiness. These segments of time present diverse powerful modes of spiritual expression.

## SECTION I. THE NATURE OF TIME

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Judaism teaches that time, like everything else in the world, was created by God for the benefit of mankind.

1. **Rabbi Tzadok HaCohen, Pri Tzadik, Vol. 1, Kedushat HaShabbat 2 – God created time for the purpose of mankind.**

The purpose of creation is for mankind, and time too was created, as is hinted in the well-known verse, “Six days God created” (Shemot/Exodus 20:10); it does not say “*in six days.*”

ותכלית הבריאה בשביל האדם והזמן ג"כ נברא כידוע לשון הכתוב ששת ימים עשה ד' ולא בששת ימים.

Time is the medium through which we are able to exercise free will, choose to study Torah, perform mitzvot, strive to perfect our character, work to achieve our mission in this world and build an eternal existence in the World to Come.

2. **Rabbi Aharon Kotler, Mishnat Rebbi Aharon I, p. 201 – Time is life itself!**

For time is life, and its loss is a loss and waste of life itself; we need to use it most positively and

והרי הזמן הוא החיים, ואיבודו הוא איבוד ובזבוז החיים עצמם, וצריך להשתמש בו באופן היותר טוב ומועיל,

productively to earn eternal existence.

לזכות על ידו לקיום נצחי.

Judaism does not look at time as static, linear progression that flows from one moment to the next without any connection to the past. Rather, Judaism views time as a cyclical dimension, a medium through which we move just like we move through space.

3. **Rabbi E.E. Dessler, Michtav Me'Eliyahu. Vol. 1, p. 103 – Time is a medium through which we travel.**

Time does not merely pass us by; rather, we move through it.

אין הזמן עובר עלינו אלא אנו הולכים בתוכו.

Rabbi Dessler goes on to explain that we travel through a weekly cycle and hence meet Shabbat once a week, while simultaneously traveling through a yearly cycle as we pass through the Jewish festivals and holidays. Our journey through time is more a like a progressive upward spiral, passing through the weekdays, Shabbat and festivals each year.

How exactly we tap into the spiritual growth opportunities throughout the year is described in the first two classes of this series, as well as in the remaining sections of this class. We will now discuss, in turn, the unique spiritual nature of Shabbat and then of the Festivals.

#### KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ⇒ Every moment in time is unique, possessing a particular purpose for mankind in general, and for the individual in particular.
- ⇒ Therefore, it's not that time just passes by, but rather we pass through "places in time." Jewish time means living in a unique time continuum which leads the world from an initial starting point to a final destiny, the realization of God's plan for His creation.
- ⇒ This is a crucial point to note. The common view of time is as a kind of "void," which we fill with the activities of our life. The approach we wish to raise is that time is *not* a void, but a continuum that traces a path for us to follow. If we do not follow the path, not only do we "waste time," but we actually "miss the boat."

## SECTION II. SHABBAT – RECOGNIZING AND ENJOYING THE GOALS OF LIFE

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The holiness of Shabbat is permanently rooted into the fabric of time by God Himself. On the first Shabbat, God "rested" from His work of creating the world. Each Shabbat offers us a sense of that completion. Hence, the holiness of Shabbat originates from its power to connect us with the purpose of creation.

The world is not yet perfect, but Shabbat is *me'ayn Olam Habah*, a taste of the World to Come. Without the weekly reminder of Shabbat, the cycle of time would spiral out of control as we would lose sight of the ultimate purpose of creation. Shabbat is our fixed point of holiness.

1. **Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (Ramchal), Derech Hashem (The Way of God) 4:7 – Time follows a seven-day pattern of mundane and holy days. The purpose of this cycle is to enrich all of our days with holiness.**

It was decreed that the days would repeat themselves following a periodic cycle which would be seven days in length. Seven was the appropriate measure for the repeating cycle, for all creation came into existence over a period of seven days... it is fitting that this number of days be considered a complete cycle...

It was decreed that the end of the cycle be holy, which would bring great elevation to the entire cycle. Even though most of the days are mundane... seeing as the holy component is at the end of the cycle and is its seal, the result is that it rectifies and uplifts the prior days of the cycle so that in the end all of man's days are made holy.

ואולם גזרה שיהיו הימים כלם מתגלגלים בשיעור מספר אחד שישוב בזמן כלו בסיבוב, והוא מספר השבעה ימים, וזה כי הנה במ נברא המציאות כלו... שראוי שיקרא שיעור שלם...

והנה כיוונה שסוף הסיבוב יהיה תמיד בקודש, ומצא זה עילוי גדול לכל הימים, שאע"פ שרובם חול... בהיות החלק הזה סוף הסיבוב וחתומו, נמצא הסיבוב כלו נתקן ומתעלה על ידי זה, עד שנמצא כל ימות האדם מתקדשים.

2. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol. II, p. 14 – The power of Shabbat overrides any worldly concerns since it is the spiritual goal of the Creation.**

In comparison to the powerful holiness of Shabbat, all things in this world are considered absolutely meaningless. For all of one's efforts [during the week] are only preparation for a goal, and Shabbat is the spiritual goal of Creation itself.

כי לעומת עוצם קדושת השבת כל דברי העולם הזה כאין וכאפס נחשבים לו, כי כולם כאחד אינם אלא הכנות לתכלית, והשבת הרי היא התכלית הרוחנית של הבריאה עצמה.

How is Shabbat the goal of creation?

3. **Ibid., p. 13 – Menuchah (rest) gives the world the means of reaching the Divine.**

The creation of the Sabbath day itself was the completion of the entire Creation. Shabbat is a creation in and of itself, a world of menuchah. Menuchah does not refer to laziness, which is in reality a form of destructiveness and death. Rather, menuchah is a break from material, physical existence. It is spiritual restfulness and peace... which is a precondition to achieving the revelation of the Divine in this world, which is the purpose of Creation.

שבראות יום השבת עצמו היא גמר מעשה בראשית. השבת היא בריאה בפני עצמה – עולם המנוחה. אין המכוון למנוחה עצלנית, מתה, שהיא כליון, אלא למנוחה מן הגשמיות. מנוחה-הנפש הזאת היא עצם חיי הרוחניות, והיא ההשתלמות לקראת גילוי השכינה בעולם הזה, זוהי שלימות הבריאה.

Shabbat is the goal of creation because it affords us with the opportunity to develop the clarity that there is one God Who created the universe, directs world history, and gives intrinsic meaning to life. (See also Ramban/Nachmanides on Devarim/Deuteronomy 5:15). Our rest on Shabbat, menuchah, enables us to recognize, participate in and enjoy the essential goals of life.

#### 4. **Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Ner Le'Elef Chumash Booklet, Bereishit (Genesis) – Our rest on Shabbat connects us to a sense of completion and an awareness of the purpose of existence.**

Just as God's rest shows that He completed His part of the creation, so man's rest should reflect an attitude that he has completed this week's cycle of his part of completing the creation.

As for man, so for the world: God's rest creates a harmony and holiness in the whole of creation. On Shabbat God finished the creation – i.e. each species could now fulfill its role to perfection as a part of the total symphony of creation. This, says the Sefat Emet, is the meaning of ויכולו. VaYechulu means נעשה כלים - on Shabbat the whole world becomes receptacles to join in harmony with higher, spiritual realities. The Shabbat world is one where there is no contradiction between the world down here and the higher worlds.

But it is not good enough to be a master of this world. One must know where it is all going, how it all fits in. Shabbat allows us to take a step back and gain a more holistic perspective of life. We are no longer caught up in the weekday details where we often get side-tracked from the purpose of life. Rather we can see how the big picture comes together, what the priorities and important things in life really are...

Shabbat is not a removal of our minds from attempting to understand this world, just as it is not a removal from the physical pleasures of this world. Quite the contrary! Oneg Shabbat [the mitzvah to engage in pleasurable activities] dictates that we partake of better foods, dress better, have more sleep and enjoy the world more than the weekday. We do all this because we want to appreciate God's world better; we want to see it all and understand how it all fits together.

Our removal is from active engagement which perforce leads to a specialized and narrow involvement in one or another aspect of the world, an undermining of the correct relationship of מעשה בראשית to its intended purpose. We remove our own creative input in order to step back, release ourselves from the "trance of action" of the weekday, learn Torah and appreciate the unity of all creation. But for that we need an active mind, alert to the lessons which God has in store for us on that day. Shabbat, then, is not so much a day of prohibited labor as a day of restoring that labor to its serving a higher end.

Although the overall goal of Shabbat is to strengthen both our belief and our relationship with God, showing sensitivity in our interpersonal relationships is also very important as illustrated in the following incident:

*One Motzei Shabbat (Saturday night) Rav Moshe [Feinstein] was traveling from Staten Island back to the Lower East Side after spending Shabbat at a satellite branch of his Yeshiva. As the students packed into the car, with Rav Moshe sitting in the front seat by the driver, the conversation began in earnest. Everyone attempted to ask Rav Moshe a question. One student asked about halachah (Jewish law), and another asked a question from the Gemara; still another student asked from the Chumash (the Torah). The conversation was animated and passionate.*

*Suddenly Rav Moshe exclaimed, "Stop, I forgot something very important. We must return to the Yeshiva right away." The driver quickly turned the car around and headed back to the Yeshiva, each boy wondering what the Rosh Yeshiva could have forgotten in Staten Island.*

*As soon as the car stopped in front of the Yeshiva, Rav Moshe alighted and made a beeline to the Yeshiva kitchen.*

*The boys in the car were shocked. Could Rav Moshe have insisted that they return to the Yeshiva just to get a snack from the dining room? Perhaps he had to eat Melaveh Malka (post-Shabbat meal) by a certain time, and that was why he had returned.*

*Entering the kitchen, Rav Moshe went straight to the inner room where the elderly Russian woman who served as the Yeshiva cook could be found.*

*What transpired next was something that, if the boys had not observed it themselves, they would not have believed it.*

*In perfect Russian, Rav Moshe said to the woman, “I am sorry I left so quickly; I have an important meeting in New York tonight. However, after I left, I realized that in my haste I had forgotten to thank you for the wonderful food you prepared for us this Shabbat. It was simply delicious and tasty as usual. Thank you so much, and please forgive me for forgetting to thank you before I left. May you be healthy and may you have joy from your children and grandchildren.”*

*The woman looked at Rav Moshe incredulously. Her face spoke volumes. It was as if she said, “Here is the great Rosh Hayeshiva (Yeshiva dean), who has the burdens of the entire Jewish community weighing heavily on his frail shoulders, and he returned from his trip home to thank me? Most people don’t even give me the time of day, and here is the Rosh Yeshiva coming back to thank me personally?”*

*Her face broke into a broad smile which, according to the students in the Yeshiva, remained for days afterwards!*

*As the students returned to the car and began to drive back to New York, one had the audacity to ask, “Rebbi, is this the law, that one has to return from his trip to say thank you? Couldn’t the Rosh Yeshiva have called the woman or sent word with someone to say thank you? Was the Rosh Yeshiva obligated to go back?”*

*Looking surprised by the question, Rav Moshe answered simply, “My precious student, there is no limit to hakarat hatov - gratitude. It is the foundation stone to our entire Torah.” (The Elephant in the Room, Rabbi Ron Yitzchok Eisenman, Mosaica Press, pp. 102 – 103)*

See further the Morasha classes Shabbat I & II.

#### KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- ∞ Time was created by God for the benefit of mankind, enabling the achievement of holiness in connecting with Him.
- ∞ The basic nature of time is the seven-day cycle, the seventh day being holy. This weekly “holy day” grants us the opportunity to imbue all our actions with elevated purpose.
- ∞ The entire week thus leads to the Shabbat, and all of our weekday actions are seen as preparations for Shabbat; “Whoever prepares on the Shabbat eve, will eat on Shabbat.”
- ∞ In this sense, Shabbat is a metaphor for the World to Come, the state of rest that is achieved when a person’s spiritual labors are complete. It is the fullest realization of human achievement – gathering together the weekday actions, and devoting them to spiritual elevation.

## SECTION III. THE FESTIVALS - MEETINGS WITH OUR MAKER

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As we travel through the annual cycle, we encounter the various yearly festivals along the path. The Jewish festivals are called *moadim*, a word that translates literally as “meetings.” The festivals are meetings in time – these are the times that we, as it were, come together with God. But what is it that we meet every year on Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot?

1. **Rabbi Shalom Noach Brezovsky, *Netivot Shalom*, Vol. II, p. 189 – Each one of these meeting points has its own spiritual energy that offers us a unique opportunity for growth.**

Each of the Jewish festivals carries a spiritual gift with it, one that inspires us throughout the entire year. This “gift” is the special essence of the festival. One can discern the essence of the festival of Sukkot from the text of the prayer that our Sages instituted for it: *Zman Simchateinu*, the time of our joy... [Similarly,] Passover is called *Zman Cheiruteinu*, the time of our freedom; Shavuot is called *Zman Matan Torateinu*, the time of the bestowal of our Torah. These characterizations capture the essence of the festival.

לכל חג משלושת הרגלים יש את סגולתו המיוחדת,  
המאירה ליהודי לכל השנה, והיא עיצומו של חג. ויש  
ללמוד ענינו של חג הסוכות שהוא זמן שמחתנו כמו  
שקבעו חז"ל את מהותו בנוסח התפילה... וכמו שפסח  
הוא זמן חרותנו ושבועות הוא זמן מתן תורתנו וזה  
עיצומו של חג.

Each festival offers us its own unique way to connect to God. Passover, for example, is a time of freedom. It was then that the Jewish people were taken out of Egypt after 210 years of bondage to become the nation that would receive God's Torah. We relive this freedom every year on an individual level through the mitzvot of Passover, which provide us with the strength to overcome our more base inclinations and free our energies for our service of God. Passover is called “the time of our freedom,” not only because historically speaking we became free from Egyptian slavery on that day, but also because the spiritual reality called “freedom” is rooted in that time of year. That is why we are told in the Haggadah that “everyone must see themselves as if they personally came out of Egypt.”

What is true for Passover is no less true for each of the festivals in the Jewish calendar. Hence, when Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch classified the festivals in his work *Horeb*, he called them *edot*, “testimonies,” because they testify to the nature of the spiritual energy rooted in their respective seasons. Just as Passover gives us an encounter with freedom, so too does Shavuot offer an experience of revelation, Rosh HaShanah of judgment, Sukkot of joy, etc.

The holiness of the Shabbat was established by God Himself and recurs throughout history on a seven-day cycle. The other holy days of the yearly calendar are determined according to the Jewish calendar established by the Jewish High Court. This is called the mitzvah of sanctifying the moon.

Each month, witnesses would testify to the sighting of the new moon, and the court would proclaim the beginning of a new month, thus determining within a framework which days the festival would be celebrated on. That is why the Hebrew word for month is *Chodesh*, meaning something new or novel. Each month is renewed with the input of mankind.

2. **Talmud Berachot 49a – By granting the Jewish people the mitzvah to sanctify the new moon, God gave them the power to determine when the holidays would occur.**

“Who sanctifies Israel and the times” – [is to be read as] Israel [the Jewish people] who sanctifies the times.

“מקדש ישראל והזמנים” ישראל דקדשינהו לזמנים.

With the exception of Shabbat that comes in its weekly appointed time without any input from us, the Jewish holidays and festivals are a *mutual* meeting of God with mankind.



### 3. **Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Commentary to Shemot 12:2 – The Jewish festival is a mutually agreed-upon meeting of God and man.**

Moadim (festivals) are times designated for our meeting with God. Explained in human terms, this meeting is to be a voluntary act for both parties. It is not to be a matter of a master summoning his servants into his presence. It is God Who wishes that His people should come to Him. That is why He specifies only in general terms the time of their coming to Him; He allows them a certain latitude within which they themselves may set the exact date of the meeting, so that the time of the meeting will be a mutual choice...

The physical phenomenon is to serve us only as a symbolic reminder. Every time that the moon reunites with the sun and receives new energy from it, God wants His people to find their way back to Him and receive new radiation from His light... Thus the reunion of the moon with the sun is to serve as a model and occasion for our own rebirth.

The mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon turned the Jewish people from passive passengers through time into drivers of the spiritual forces of time. By having a hand in determining when God will infuse the relevant spiritual energies of the festivals, we ourselves come to sanctify time!

There is a deeper understanding of the nature of time and the spiritual energies inherent in the festivals. Why, for instance, do we eat matzah on Passover? Why do we live in a sukkah on Sukkot? On one level, these holidays commemorate the historical experiences of our ancestors when they emerged from Egyptian slavery, but would we still have Passover or Sukkot had there never been an Exodus? The Torah answers in the affirmative and tells us to relate the following to our children:

### 4. **Shemot 13:8 with Rashi – The Exodus happened in order to facilitate our mitzvah performance.**

And so you shall tell your children on that day, "It is on account of this that God acted on my behalf in taking me out of Egypt."

Rashi: *on account of this...* for the sake of me fulfilling His mitzvot, such as these – eating the Passover offering, matzah, and *marror* (bitter herb of Passover).

והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה עשה יקוק לי בצאתי ממצרים:

רשי: בעבור זה - בעבור שאקיים מצותיו, כגון פסח מצה ומרור הללו.

That is, the Exodus happened *because* of the mitzvot of Passover – not the other way around, as we are accustomed to thinking. Strange as it may sound at first, what the Torah is telling us here is that we do not eat matzah to commemorate the Exodus; God orchestrated the Exodus because there is a mitzvah to eat matzah on Passover.

Passover is intrinsically a time of freedom, of birth and of rebirth for the Jewish people. That was just as true before the Exodus as it is after, only now we have the national historical experience of the Exodus to help us relate to it. It is not surprising then that we find our ancestors eating matzah long before the events of the Exodus took place. For instance, Abraham's nephew Lot ate matzah on Passover some four hundred years before the Exodus.

### 5. **Bereishit 19:3 with Rashi – When angels came to visit Lot, he baked them matzah, because it was Passover.**

[Lot] kept urging them until they finally turned aside to him and came into his house. He made a

ויפצר במ מאד ויסרו אליו ויבאו אל ביתו ויעש להם משתה ומצות אפה ויאכלו.



*feast for them and baked matzah, and they ate.*

*Rashi: and baked matzah... it was Passover.*

רש"י: ומצות אפה – פסח היה.

This perspective on Jewish holidays is the hallmark of a deeper philosophical outlook on the nature of the Torah. Just as the Jewish holidays are not merely markers of the historical past but expressions of spiritual realities, so it is with the entire Torah. (See also Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveichik, Beit HaLevi, Parshat Bo). The Torah is not merely a system of law designed to make order out of the chaos of nature. Rather, it is God's blueprint in creating the world. Everything that exists does so as an expression of the Torah.

## 6. Bereishit Rabbah 1:1 – The Torah is God's blueprint for creation.

The Torah claims, "I was God's blueprint." This can be compared to when a king of flesh and blood builds his palace he does not do so on his own; he uses an architect. The architect too does not rely solely on his own wits but uses his building plans and blueprints in order to know where to put rooms and entrances. So too did God look into the Torah and build the world.

התורה אומרת אני הייתי כלי אומנתו של הקב"ה, בנוהג שבועולם מלך בשר ודם בונה פלטין, אינו בונה אותה מדעת עצמו אלא מדעת אומן, והאומן אינו בונה אותה מדעת עצמו, אלא דיפתראות, ופינקסאות יש לו, לדעת היאך הוא עושה חדרים, היאך הוא עושה פשפשין, כך היה הקב"ה מביט בתורה, ובורא את העולם.

## 7. Rabbi Akiva Tatz, Worldmask, Targum Press, pp. 13-17 – Torah is the cause, and the world is the result.

Torah and the world parallel each other exactly. Torah is the spiritual core, the world is its physical expression...The nature of the parallel between Torah and physical reality is that Torah is the cause and the world is the result. It is not enough to understand that there is a correspondence between every detail of the physical universe and the Torah; it is essential to realize that each detail of the world exists because the Torah says so. In fact, every fine nuance of each detail exists exactly as it does in the world only because the Torah itself contains each of those details within details.

The analogy most commonly used to portray this relationship is that of a blueprint: the Torah is the blueprint of the world. Just as an architect first draws up plans and the builder then follows those plans when building the physical structure, God first brought the Torah into being and then created the world using the Torah as its plan, [as it says:] "He looked into the Torah and created the world."

But there is another depth here: the Torah is not simply a plan in the sense of an architect's drawings; it is a plan in the sense of genes which themselves actually carry out the construction of the organism which results from the code carried in those genes. Certainly, the genetic code corresponds to the physical features which the organism possesses, but it would be a serious mistake to imagine that this correspondence is descriptive, that the genes somehow reflect in a coded form the physical reality; the genes do not describe, they do not reflect. They are the reason that the body looks as it does, they are the instructions and the mechanism which construct the physical. In fact, the body is a reflection of the genes!

Hence, the Jewish calendar is not merely a list of commemorations of past events; rather they are vibrant celebrations and opportunities for us to become energized and integrate the unique spiritual realities expressed by each festival.

## KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:

- ≈ Festivals provide a framework of “meeting points” between God and man. In each festival, we “meet God” in the particular context defined by that festival.
- ≈ The idea of “meeting God” is most directly expressed by the obligation to ascend to the Temple Mount on each of the three annual festivals, and, in the words of the biblical verse, “to appear before God” (see Shemot 23:17).
- ≈ On the one hand, the festivals mean to commemorate an event of Divine intervention in the world, such as the Exodus, the giving of the Torah, and the miraculous Divine direction in the wilderness. Yet on the other, the commemoration itself – the mitzvah involved in the festival – is the reason for the event having taken place. This profound idea manifests the “meeting” between man and God that festivals define.
- ≈ In the same sense, the festivals demonstrate the mastery over time that God granted the Jewish People, in giving them the power to determine when a new month begins on the lunar calendar. Unlike the sanctity of Shabbat that is set by God, the Divine sanctity of the festivals is set by the Jewish People. Festivals are therefore the ultimate expression of the Man-God partnership: The sanctity bestowed by God is in the hands of man.

## SECTION IV. RABBINIC COMMEMORATIONS: PURIM, CHANUKAH & THE THREE WEEKS

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The commemorations of Rabbinic nature, namely Purim, Chanukah and the Three Weeks, follow this same pattern. For example, the Chanukah miracles of the war and the Menorah are not only one-time events that reshaped Jewish history; rather, the dedication of the Jewish people that led to these miracles also inspired an eternal, Divinely-infused spiritual energy that is revealed each Chanukah, and is available to every Jew.

In instituting these festivals and the mitzvot that we perform on them, our Sages meant to reveal the special spiritual energy inherent in those times. As Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman explains, every mitzvah of the Sages bears a Divine stamp:

### 1. **Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman, Kuntres Divrei Sofrim, p. 7 – Everything contributes to the world at some time or another.**

With all the Rabbinic commandments and prohibitions, the Sages aligned their minds with the thoughts of God...and for this reason we are obligated to do as they say, for in doing so we are fulfilling the Will of God that they were able to fathom, since their minds were aligned with His.

בכל המצות ואיסורין של דבריהן הסכימה דעתן  
לדעת המקום... ומהאי טעמא אנו חייבין לעשות  
כדבריהן שהרי אנו מקיימין בזה רצון השי"ת  
שהסכימה דעתן לדעתו.

That explains why on Chanukah we recite the blessing upon lighting the menorah, “Blessed are You, Lord our God, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to light the Chanukah candles.” Even though lighting the menorah is not a Biblical commandment (and thus directly ordered by God), we understand that like all Rabbinic enactments, it is a revelation of God’s Will. So whether the essence of time is revealed to us by the Torah or by our Sages, we understand that our festivals are unique opportunities to enhance our spiritual growth.

Yet, there is a pointed difference between the Torah festivals and those that were enacted by the Sages. The distinction is that whereas the Torah festivals commemorate events involving clear Divine intervention in the affairs of men – the Exodus, the giving of the Torah, and so on – the rabbinic festivals commemorate Divine direction even in times of Divine concealment.

Purim, therefore, means to demonstrate Divine presence in the natural world. The name of God goes entirely unmentioned in the Megillah (the Book of Esther); we must find God between the lines.

## 2. Rabbi Shimshon Pincus, Purim, p. 20 – Finding God in the natural world.

This is also the reason that no name of God is mentioned in the Scroll of Esther. This is because if His name would be written explicitly, this would constitute a departure from the natural, into the supernatural – which belongs to Passover rather than Purim. Purim reveals that each aspect *within* nature is imbued with the love of God...

Where does one find more intense love: in Passover or in Purim? On Passover God raised us over the entire world, but on Purim we discover God in every nook and cranny of the natural world.

זוהי גם הסיבה לכך שלא מוזכר בכל המגילה אף שם משמות הש"י, כיון שאם היה כתוב בגלוי שמו של הקב"ה היתה זו יציאה מגדר הטבע למעל הטבע, וזה כבר נוגע לפסח. אך פורים מגלה לנו שכל דבר בתוך הטבע החשוך זוהי פיסגת האהבה...

היכן רואים יותר אהבה בפורים או בפסח? בחג הפסח הרים אותנו הקב"ה מעל העולם, אבל בפורים אנו מגלים את הקב"ה בכל נקודה ונקודה של טבע.

In a similar sense, the day of Purim is named after the lots that Haman drew. Although things might look random, there is in fact a Director who guides history through to its destiny.

## 3. Ibid, p. 21 – Purim is named after drawing lots: the inner power of nature.

This point is also embodied in the name and quintessence of the day of Purim – which is named after the lots (*pur*). On the face of it, there is nothing more natural than drawing lots, for one lot will always emerge from the lottery. There is therefore room to claim, mistakenly, that this lot only came out by chance.

Yet, several examples in the Torah and the Prophets demonstrate that the drawing of lots is in fact a direct expression of the work of God. This is the reason that the Land of Israel was divided according to lots. Initially, each tribe demanded the best land for itself, such as the land beside the sea, and so on, until one of the tribes arose to state that it desired the decision of God Himself. How was God's decision given? By the drawing of lots.

... This is the essence of Purim, named after the lots – and this first mitzvah of Purim, the reading of the Scroll, reveals to us the inner nature of the world. The Maharal teaches (Tiferet Yisrael, Ch.

נקודה זו טמונה גם בעצם שמו ומהותו של יום זה – "פורים" על שם הפור. שלכאורה אין דבר טבעי יותר מגורל, שהרי לעולם יצא פתק אחד מתוך הגורל, וא"כ ניתן לכאורה לטעות ולטעון כי אך "במקרה" יצא פתק זה דוקא.

אולם מכמה דוגמאות מהתורה ומהנביאים אנו רואים כי אדרבה, גורל הוא ביטוי לפעולתו של הקב"ה בכבודו ובעצמו. זהו הביאור שעל פי גורל נחלקה הארץ לשבטים, שהנה כל שבט ושבט דרש לעצמו את החלקים המובחרים כגון ליד הים וכיו"ב, עד שקם אחד השבטים ואמר אין אני חפץ בהכרעה אלא ע"י הקב"ה בכבודו ובעצמו. ומהי הכרעת הקב"ה בכבודו ובעצמו? הגורל (ע"י במדב"ר פכ"א ט ומאירי משלי יח יח).

... זוהי המהות של פורים, על שם הפור, וזו המצוה הראשונה של פורים, קריאת המגילה שהיא מגלה לנו את המהות של העולם. המהר"ל אומר (תפארת

53) that when God sealed the Jewish nation for destruction, this was considered as if they had actually ceased to exist. God then created them as a new nation, with a renewed acceptance of the Torah.

The festival of Purim reveals not only the great love that is aroused at a time of danger, but also the inner nature of the world – the thoughts that we must have when we drink a cup of water and recite a blessing over it. The Scroll of Esther reveals the greatest closeness to God that is present in the world of nature: the power of Purim is in nature itself!

ישראל ריש פרק נג) שכאשר הקב"ה חתם את עם ישראל למיתה הרי זה נחשב למיתה ממש. אחר כך ברא הקב"ה עם חדש עם קבלת התורה מחודשת.

חג פורים מגלה לנו לא רק את האהבה הגדולה שהתעוררה בשעת הסכנה, אלא את כל מהות העולם, את מה שכל אחד צריך לחשוב כאשר הוא שותה כוס מים ומברך "שהכל נהיה בדברו". המגילה מגלה את הקרבה הגדולה ביותר לקב"ה הקיימת בעולם הטבע. העוצמה של פורים נמצאת בטבע!

Chanukah, in a similar sense, means to dispel the Greek ideology which undermined the fundamentals of Judaism. The main thrust of the Greek *Weltanschauung* was the self-sufficiency of mankind, and the corresponding lack of Divine intervention in the affairs of the world. What you see, stated the Greek worldview, is what there is – and there is nothing beyond. The miracles of Chanukah came to uproot this philosophy.

#### 4. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Siftei Chaim, Vol. II, pp. 82-83 – The Greeks viewed the world as a random collection of events.**

The outlook of the Greek thinkers was in opposition to the teachings of the Torah. The Greek position is that the world always existed, that God did not create the universe from absolute nothingness, and He has no ability to change anything in the world. According to them, the world "always was, is, and will be," for it always existed, and is not susceptible to change.

From this we derive another principle of the Greeks: that the forces of nature rule the world. All circumstances and events throughout a person's life are not in compensation for any good or bad actions (they deny the Jewish principle of faith in God's capabilities and reward and punishment) rather they are consequences of totally random acts of nature...

דעת חכמי היוונים - בניגוד לאמונת התורה - היא שהעולם הוא קדמון והשי"ת לא חידשו מן האין המוחלט, ואין ביכולתו לשנות בעולם מאומה. ולפי שיטתם העולם הוא "היה, הוה, יהיה" כי הוא קדום ובלתי ניתן לשינוי.

ומכך נובע יסוד נוסף בהשקפת עולמם, והוא שכוחות הטבע הם השולטים בבריאה וכל המאורעות והמקרים העוברים על האדם בימי חייו אינם באים עליו כגמול על מעשיו הטובים והרעים (וכפרו ביסוד אמונת ישראל של יכולת ה' ושכר ועונש) אלא הם תולדות הטבע באופן מקרי לחלוטין...

The miracles of Chanukah – both the military victory against all the odds, and the miracle of the flask of oil which lasted for eight days, came to demonstrate the falseness of this outlook.

### The Three Weeks

The tragic actions of the newly founded Jewish nation worshipping the Golden Calf on the Seventeenth of Tammuz (the tenth month of the Jewish calendar, falling in June or July), and the acceptance of the negative

report of the Spies on the Ninth of Av (the eleventh month) caused a long-term negative impact on Jewish history. Five calamities occurred on the Seventeenth of Tammuz, including Moshe breaking the Tablets and the Romans breaching the outer walls of Jerusalem, which led to the Second Temple destruction. Both the First Temple and the Second Temple were destroyed on Tishah B'Av. These tragic events have been mourned throughout Jewish history and observed by fasting and personal introspection. It was the spiritual and moral shortcomings of the Jewish people that led to this destruction:

#### 5. **Talmud Bavli, Yoma 9b – The three cardinal transgressions led to the destruction of the First Temple.**

Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because of three [evil] things which prevailed at that time: idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed...

מקדש ראשון מפני מה חרב מפני שלשה דברים שהיו  
בו עבודה זרה וגילוי עריות ושפיכות דמים...

#### 6. **Talmud Bavli, Yoma 9b – Baseless hatred among Jews led to the destruction of the Second Temple.**

But why was the Second Temple destroyed? Were the Jews not occupied with Torah, mitzvot, and the practice of kind deeds? [The Second Temple was destroyed] because there was unjustified hatred between Jews (sinat chinam). This teaches that unjustified hatred is equated with the three transgressions [that caused the destruction of the First Temple] – idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed combined.

אבל מקדש שני שהיו עוסקין בתורה ובמצוות וגמילות  
חסדים מפני מה חרב מפני שהיתה בו שנאת חנם  
ללמדך ששקולה שנאת חנם כנגד שלש עבירות עבודה  
זרה גלוי עריות ושפיכות דמים...

This period of the Three Weeks provides each generation with the opportunity to rectify the source of those errors and to elevate the Jewish people to the highest spiritual levels and to enable the rebuilding of the Temple. Since the last Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred, we need to develop genuine respect and love for our fellow Jews.

#### 7. **Sfat Emet, Rosh HaShanah, 5641 – Loving one's fellow Jew will help rebuild the Temple.**

Since the Temple was destroyed by baseless hatred, it will – please God – be rebuilt by loving our fellow Jews.

כיון שע"י שנאת חנם נחרב. כ"ש שע"י אהבת ישראל  
יהי נבנה בעזה"י.

See further the Morasha classes on Purim, Chanukah and the Three Weeks.

#### KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV:

- ≈ Like Torah festivals, rabbinic festivals mean to commemorate not only the event they recall, but also to give human expression to a time of the year laden with unique spiritual potential.
- ≈ The fundamental difference between Torah festivals and their rabbinic counterparts is the difference between revelation and hiding. Torah festivals commemorate and represent Divine revelations: They are explicit “meetings” between God and humankind. Rabbinic festivals, on the other hand, are essentially non-explicit – so much so that the Scroll of Esther does not even make mention of the Name of God.

- ∞ Rabbinic festivals reveal the God that “works behind the scenes,” directing the course of history without great revelations related to Torah festivals. On Chanukah and Purim, and during the Three Weeks, a Divinely-infused spiritual energy is revealed to the world. This power is available for every Jew to enhance his spiritual growth.

## SECTION V. MAXIMIZING THE MOMENT

The word for time in Hebrew, *zman*, reflects the meaning inherent in time itself. *Zman* means “prepared.” Not only the Jewish festivals, but every moment in time has been prepared by God for a specific purpose. No moment is without the potential for actualizing the intended objective of that instant.

### 1. **Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 3:1 – Everything contributes to the world at some time or another.**

Everything has its season, and there is a time for everything under the heavens.

לְכֹל זְמַן וְזֶמַן וְעֵת לְכֹל חֶפְזָן תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם.

All the major events in this world, and specifically in Jewish history, follow a Divine plan.

### 2. **Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 46:2 – The commandment of circumcision was given to Avraham and to the Jewish People at predetermined times.**

“Everything has its season...” [Kohelet 3:1] there was a [designated] time for Abraham when the mitzvah of circumcision was given to him ... and there were two [designated] times for his descendents to be circumcised, once in Egypt and once in the desert...

לְכֹל זְמַן וְכֹ' זְמַן הָיָה לוֹ לְאַבְרָהָם אֵימָתִי שְׁנֵיתָנָה לוֹ מִיֵּלֶה וְכֹ' זְמַן הָיָה לָהֶם לְבָנָיו שֶׁנִּמְוָלוּ שְׁתֵּי פַעֲמִים אֶחָד בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶחָד בְּמִדְבָּר.

God waited until the precise time arrived to give the mitzvah of circumcision to Abraham and later to his descendents at the time of the Exodus. Similarly, we are commanded to perform every mitzvah at the time that will bring about the greatest benefit for mankind. The timing of each mitzvah is crucial to its proper execution. As such, we are called upon to help elevate the world by doing mitzvot at the appropriate times.

### 3. **Rabbi Shlomo Eliashev, Sefer HaDe'ah (Leshem), Part 2, Drush 2, Anaf 1 – Every moment carries a potential for spiritual connection.**

From the time of the giving of the Torah and on, they [the parts of the world that require rectification] are elevated and rectified little by little, and every hour and moment has a [specific] rectification.

הִנֵּה מַעַת מַתֵּן תּוֹרָה וְלֹהֵאֱלֹאֵהּ הֵם מִיִּתְקַנִּים וְעוֹלָיִם תְּמוּד לֹאט לֹאט וְאֵין שְׁעָה וְלֹא רִגְעָה בְּלֹא תִיקוּן.

Every minute offers the opportunity to improve and perfect the world by following the mitzvot that we are commanded to do at that time; every moment is an opportunity for connection to God and His plan for creation. Rabbi Aharon Kotler, founder of Beit Medrash Govoha - Lakewood Yeshiva (one of most important contemporary institutions of higher Jewish education) and who was instrumental in rebuilding world Jewry after the Holocaust, is an example of an individual who understood the importance of time.



When Rav Aharon Kotler arrived at Pennsylvania Station in New York City in April 1941, it was nothing like his departure from Vilna's train terminal [where a capacity crowd had gathered to say farewell to one of the world's most eminent Torah scholars and leaders]. Few in America had ever heard the name "Aharon Kotler" before, and a select delegation of those who were aware of his reputation assembled on the concrete platform. This skeletal welcoming committee consisted of individuals from the Agudath Harabbanim and Agudath Israel.

Reb Aharon looked at – make that stared at – his audience and got straight to the point. "European Jewry is being consumed by fire," he said in rapid, staccato Yiddish, "and the Yeshivot have been destroyed. There is not much time left. Only you, the Jews of America, can save them!" Reb Aharon's piercing blue eyes stung the assembled. "Now, there isn't a second to waste. Save them!"

The very next day Reb Aharon was on the phone asking those that he had met on the train platform what they had done. Everyone understood that this was to be the first in series of many phone calls to come...

Reb Aharon's professed goal was to reestablish in America what had been lost in Europe. This dream remained in abeyance during the first part of the war when all his attention was focused on Holocaust rescue work via the Vaad Hatzalah.

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Reb Aharon's devotion to Torah learning defies description. Despite physical weakness, he never languished in his learning. Reb Aharon treasured and utilized every moment. He never walked at a leisurely pace – for speed walking was a more time efficient way to arrive at a destination. While plotting his escape from Poland, he and his associates would listen to the military news on the radio and between dispatches, during pauses in the broadcast or when static made the news momentarily undecipherable, Reb Aharon would consult his Gemara as if he was listening to a discourse. During his train ride across Communist Russia where mortal danger lurked along every inch of the way he conducted himself as if he was sitting in a Vilna Beit Midrash.

Twenty years later, nothing had changed. Rabbi Avraham Stefansky, a Lakewood student, drove Reb Aharon to an Agudah convention, and they arrived as delegates and guests milled about in the lobby. If those present had blinked they would have missed their fleeting glimpse of the Rosh Yeshiva. In his typical style, Reb Aharon zoomed inside, passing Rav Moshe Feinstein and other prominent Gedolim, and was off to his room.

Rabbi Stefansky made great strides, literally and figuratively, to keep up with the Rosh Yeshiva and this was no facile endeavor. Rabbi Stefansky opened the door for his mentor, and Reb Aharon noticed to his horror that the room was not equipped with a table and chair. The escort understood at once what his mission was. When he returned to the room a few minutes later with the minimal furniture, he found Reb Aharon lying on the bed writing his Talmudic commentaries. Despite the absence of the proper facilities, not a second had been lost. (Hanoach Teller, *Builders*, NYC Publishers, pp. 71, 73, 83, 114.)

Although the *Modus Operandi* of Rabbi Kotler may be difficult to emulate, his persona gives us a glimpse into the awesome value of time.

#### KEY THEMES OF SECTION V:

- ≈ Every moment offers its own unique opportunity for actualizing a spiritual purpose. As noted above, time is not a void but rather a continuum, which implies that no two moments on the timeline are the same. Each has its own spiritual content, with which we are called to resonate.
- ≈ The mitzvot, so many of which must be performed at specific times, take advantage of these opportunities.



## CLASS SUMMARY:

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### WHAT IS THE JEWISH CONCEPT OF TIME?

Every moment in time is unique, with a particular purpose. Therefore, it's not that time just passes by, but rather we pass through "places in time." Jewish time means living in a unique time continuum which leads the world from an initial starting point to a final destiny.

### WHAT MAKES SHABBAT AND THE FESTIVALS MORE HOLY THAN OTHER DAYS?

The holiness of Shabbat is permanently rooted into the fabric of time by God Himself. On the first Shabbat, God "rested" from His work of creating the world. Each Shabbat offers us a sense of that completion. Hence, the holiness of Shabbat originates from its ability to connect us with the purpose of creation.

The Jewish festivals are called *moadim*, a word that translates literally as "meetings." These are the times that we, as it were, meet with God. On one level, these holidays commemorate the historical experiences of our ancestors, and each contains a unique spiritual essence that is reflected in the prayers: Sukkot is *Zman Simchateinu*, the time of our joy, Passover is called *Zman Cheiruteinu*, the time of our freedom; Shavuot is called *Zman Matan Torateinu*, the time of the bestowal of our Torah.

There is a deeper understanding of the nature of time and the spiritual energies inherent in the festivals. Since the Torah is the DNA, so to speak, of creation, the festivals manifest spiritual energy and mitzvot that are inherent in the Torah.

### WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SHABBAT AND FESTIVAL DAYS?

Unlike Shabbat, the sanctity of the festivals depends on human intervention: Only by means of our setting the Jewish calendar does the sanctity of the festivals descend to the world. Thus, whereas Shabbat is akin to the World to Come, representing the ultimate destiny that the world is nearing, the festivals manifest the partnership between God and man in bringing the world to this destiny.

Sometimes, this concept of partnership is revealed in the great revelations that Torah festivals mean to commemorate. Sometimes, it is hidden. Yet, even when hidden, the partnership remains true, and this is the theme that the rabbinic festivals bring out.

### WHY ARE MANY MITZVOT TIME-RELATED?

Many mitzvot are related to time because they mean to "tune in" to the special nature of every given moment. Since time is a continuum and not a void, it follows that no two "elements of time" are the same. Recognizing this, the time-related mitzvot present us with the spiritual fruit pertinent to each given time.

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## ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

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Maharal, Tiferet Yisrael, Chapter 40

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveichik, Beit HaLevi, Parshat Bo

Sarah Yoheved Rigler, Holy Woman: The Road to Greatness of Chaya Sara Kramer (Shaar Press, 2006)