

Sparks

by Rabbi David Aaron
*Founder and Dean, Isralight
Rosh Yeshiva, Orayta*

Successful People are Unaccomplished

Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy, a day of solemn rest to the Lord. (Exodus 35:2)

During the forty years that the Israelites wandered in the desert they carried with them a portable temple referred to as the Tabernacle or the *Mishkan*. The creative acts that are forbidden on Shabbat are those acts similar to the skills that went into building or assembling the *Mishkan*. The Talmud outlines 39 different categories of such creative acts that are forbidden to do on Shabbat. They represent our ultimate power of creativity which is to build a temple that accommodates the presence of G-d on earth. Of course we know that G-d does not literally dwell in the *Mishkan*, however, the *Mishkan* symbolizes our ability to serve G-d and infuse every moment and every place with the presence of G-d. In other words the greatest accomplishment of a human being is to serve to make manifest G-d's presence in the here and the now.

The building of the *Mishkan* represents the greatest accomplishment that we could ever imagine to accomplish in our lives. G-d created the world for you and me and our joy, task and service is to take this world and build it into a sanctuary for the presence of G-d. The greatest accomplishment that we could ever do is to do something for G-d. This is one of the most amazing ideas in Torah tradition, that we human beings can do something for G-d. It is human nature to feel great when we can do something for an important or famous person. Torah teaches that we can even do something for He who is the greatest -- G-d. This is one of the most mystical ideas in Jewish tradition--G-d created work for us to do for Him. When I act on my own behalf it is no great shakes but when I act on G-d's behalf it takes me beyond myself and connects me to G-d.

When we build the *Mishkan* we are creating a space for G-d to become present in this world and this is the greatest human accomplishment imaginable. Why then are we commanded to refrain on Shabbat from the greatest act of human creativity and accomplishment? To ensure that we are truly doing it for G-d's sake. Otherwise it could be just another ego trip.

I remember when my wife was pregnant with our first child she kept saying that she hopes that she will give birth on Shabbat. I actually hoped not because that would mean that I would have to break Shabbat to get us to the hospital. I would have to use the phone and get into a car, which is traditionally not done on Shabbat. Of course it is permissible since it could be a matter of life and death, which overrides the laws of Shabbat. Nonetheless for me breaking Shabbat was unthinkable. My wife, however, insisted, "I have a feeling it will be on Shabbat." I said, "Well, have another feeling." During the ninth month, I would get more and more nervous as we approached Shabbat. Sure enough as soon as my wife lights the Shabbat candles she sits down and says, "I'm in labor." Okay so now I am hoping for a long labor.

“How about a 24 hour deal, honey? You just sit and relax until Saturday night.” That is not quite what happened. Although my wife never likes to rush, for some reason the baby did and the contractions started getting intense quite quickly. I had been celebrating Shabbat for 15 years and now I am going to break Shabbat, use the phone to call a cab and ride in a car on the holy Shabbat. As we were driving to the hospital I suddenly realized what a fake I am. If my Shabbat were truly a service of G-d then this is not breaking Shabbat rather this is the way G-d wants me to celebrate Shabbat this week. Driving in a car on Shabbat to take my wife to give birth is the way I serve G-d this Shabbat. I then realized that my religious life could simply be a self-serving spiritual habit rather than a sacred service to G-d. Rather than my religious life express my desire to infuse the here and now with the presence of G-d it could be just another way to fulfill my ego and gain approval from others in my religious community. The sages tell us that when we do something to gain public approval it is worse than idol worship. When you worship idols at least you know you are an idolater but when you do commandments to gain public approval you still think you are serving G-d. Riding in that car on that Shabbat was one of the most meaningful Shabbat experiences I ever had. I had first thought I was breaking Shabbat but it was ok. But I then finally understood that I was truly fulfilling Shabbat in the most sacred way.

Now imagine it is Friday afternoon, it's the dawn of the sixth millennium, six thousand years we have been waiting for the Messiah and finally he has come and we are building the tabernacle. Within minutes we complete the ultimate accomplishment we have been dreaming of but Shabbat is coming soon. We need just ten more minutes to complete the temple and infuse this world with the complete presence of G-d -- but Shabbat is starting in five minutes. Would we stop? Could we stop? Are we willing to let go of the greatest service to G-d, the ultimate accomplishment humanly possible? Are we going to blow the rectification of the universe for five minutes of Shabbat and wait 25 hours to resume?

But this is exactly the message of Shabbat and the blessing it bears.

If we are really building the Temple for G-d than if the Boss says stop we stop. The goal is not to finish the temple rather the goal is to infuse every moment with the presence of G-d through service. If you cannot stop then you were building the temple for yourself.

This is the amazing lesson we can learn from the story of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham dedicated his life in service to the one G-d and invested all his energies to make the presence of G-d known on earth. He wanted a son to be the heir to his spiritual mission and continue his service spreading the truth of the G-d of love. Miraculously at a very old age Sarah conceives and they have a son Isaac. But G-d then asks Abraham to sacrifice his long awaited son. Imagine what must have gone through Abraham's head. G-d, do You know what that will do to everything I have done for You all these years? My whole mission will be destroyed. Your name that I have worked so hard to promote and sanctify on earth will be desecrated. Think of the headline on the front page of the Canaanite Times. Abraham Phony! Embraces Idolatrous Practice and Sacrifices His Son.

This story reveals the true meaning of service. G-d is asking Abraham to serve Him by giving up his life long service. In this case Abraham's service to G-d is to sacrifice his service to G-d. This is the ultimate test of true service. If you are really concerned about doing the will of G-d then simply do what He asks. G-d is saying to Abraham, “I know you're a big Rabbi and you are spreading My name on earth and I know this is going to destroy everything, but that is what I want.” So this is the greatest test. Did Abraham truly dedicate his life to the service of G-d or was his mission really just an ego trip in

disguise? If Abraham truly worked for G-d than he accepted that whatever the boss says goes. Abraham understands: I do not own this world and I am not the Master of history. I just work here serving to infuse this world with G-d's presence according to His will.

This is the subtle challenge of the religious life. Am I really serving G-d? If a religious organization steals money to support their activities to spread the word of G-d then they have missed the point and are not truly serving G-d.

In summary: What is Shabbat all about? Shabbat is a time to stop. And when we stop that retroactively affirms that everything we have done until now is truly in service to G-d. If the boss closes shop and doesn't want us to work why would we even want to do work? Otherwise we are confused and think we are self-employed. Shabbat reminds us that we just work here in this moment, in this moment, in this moment. Shabbat teaches us that the future that we are looking forward is not any more important than this moment right now in our service to G-d. Only the now is real and only now is the time to bring G-d's presence into the world. Shabbat empowers us to stop, chill out, beat the rush and be at peace now.

Shabbat is a challenge to the modern man caught in the rat race chasing rainbows. When I host people at my home for Shabbat or conduct a Shabbat experience at Isralight I find most newcomers are very stressed out about trying to relax.

A lot of people simply can't let go and let G-d. They get fidgety. They sit there at the Shabbat dinner table nervously bouncing their leg up and down. They simply can't be present. They are afraid to immerse themselves into the moment and impatiently want to get on with life. Shabbat is truly an accomplishment. The accomplishment is *not* to accomplish and just be. Shabbat restores your soul and makes you whole. If you are single then the best place to find your soul mate is over a Shabbat meal. And if you are married that best to renew your love is over a Shabbat meal because that is when we are most soul. Shabbat is holy. It is time to become whole with yourself, with your loved ones and with G-d.

Rabbi David Aaron

Author of *Endless Light, Seeing G-d, The Secret Life of G-d, Inviting G-d In, Living A Joyous Life, The G-d-Powered Life, Love is My Religion, Tefillah Training*