

“Shabbat: The Greatest Gift My Parents Ever Gave Me”

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When I was younger I had more energy. I know it's hard to believe but at one point in my life, I had more energy than I have now. The boundless energy I had as a child had to be channeled and my parents knew it. In fact, the most common phrase I heard my mother say while we were growing up was, “Go outside and play.” Shabbat afternoon was the perfect time for doing just that - and we used to play for hours. As a boy, I looked forward to the afternoons of playing ball in the spring and summer months. I remember the hours of ping pong in the basement, and basketball in the driveway, softball in the street and Frisbee in the park. We would play until the very last minute, which was an hour before Shabbat ended, when we had to go back to services with our father. I remember the mad dash to change out of our shorts, and back into Shabbat clothes to begin the walk back to synagogue. I remember that we hadn't even stopped sweating yet. We might grab a drink or a piece of fruit as my father would encourage us to get going already. He would stand at the door ready to leave while we were grabbing a tie or our suit jacket and he would say what has become the running joke of our family, “We have never been this late.” We would spend the mile-long walk to the synagogue talking about bad calls and insane shots we made or missed, softballs that we hit a mile and catches that were unconscious.

Now that I think about it, I remember a few years ago we had the pleasure of being back at my parents' house for Shabbat. Just like the old days, we went out to the driveway to play basketball. The teams have changed now that I have turned out to be the shortest and the games were a lot shorter. They were equally intense, we just got tired. Those Shabbat afternoons were great. There's no question there were weeks when I couldn't wait for the afternoon to end. There's no question there were times when Shabbat was long and lonely. There's no question that at times Shabbat seemed like a burden filled with don'ts and there was no question that we were going to observe Shabbat every week, with no time off for good behavior. There were no exceptions. Shabbat was sacred and my parents made sure we weren't doing anything that would interfere. Even though there were parties I missed, movies I didn't go to with friends and sporting events that had to be taped rather than watched in real time, my parents laid down the law. There is no breaking Shabbat. I remember the games we would make up to get the time to pass more quickly. On one rainy day, I recall sitting by the front door of the house with a bag of potato chips trying to see which one of us could fit the largest chip in our mouth without it breaking. I also recall my older brother flicking a chip at me, which resulted in a huge brawl raising my parents from their nap. But that was basically how our Shabbat afternoons went. We played and they slept. They got up and we went to services. There were plenty of times over the course of my childhood that I would have preferred to be doing something else. However, today I wouldn't trade Shabbat for anything. Although there are aspects of my childhood Shabbat that I have retained and others I have changed, Shabbat remains one of the greatest gifts my parents have given me.

That is why I believe this week's portion is like the Ten Commandments, because it puts these two laws together. The fourth commandment is to observe Shabbat and keep it holy, while the fifth commandment is to honor your mother and father so that you might live - as if to suggest

they are connected, which gives rise to the comment by *Hizkuni* in this week's portion when they are coupled once again. When the Torah says, "*Ish imo v'aviv tira-u, v'et shabtotai tishmoru,*" "You shall revere your mother and father and keep Shabbat." (Leviticus 19:3) – *Hizkuni* comments *k'shem she'b'aseret dibrot ne'emar kibud av v'eim etzel shemirat shabbat*, just as it states, "To honor your mother and father" next to "Keep Shabbat," so too, we're suppose to learn that we must respect our parents just as we respect God, by observing Shabbat. *Hizkuni* says, "We observe Shabbat because it is a gift from God and to discard it would be to discard God." However, the text becomes much more complicated when it teaches what I believe is the fundamental guiding principle of this week's reading, respect for others. Again, 27 verses later, it speaks of Shabbat and then remarks, "Respect the elderly." "*Et shabtotai tishmoru* - observe Shabbat, followed almost immediately by *mipnei seiva takum*, rise before the elderly (19:30). Again the text says, "If you learn the value of showing respect for others, you'll learn to respect God through the observance of Shabbat" or vice versa. If we respect God through the observance of Shabbat, then we can learn to respect others as well. This point is hit hard just a few verses later when it speaks of how we are supposed to treat the stranger among us with respect. (19:33) Again, the common theme of respecting others is demanded. Then, the most outstanding of teachings: *V'ahavta lo camocha*, love him as yourself. (19:34) Which we have already heard in a different iteration earlier in the torah reading *V'ahavta l'reiacha camocha* – "Love your neighbor as yourself." (19:18) So, you can't love your neighbor until you first love yourself.

Now, it's quite clear what the real message is. We must respect God, we must respect each other and, finally, we must respect ourselves. All of this is encapsulated in Shabbat. By observing Shabbat we can do it all and it can begin anywhere you feel comfortable. If you find it's easier to respect others, then you will learn how to apply that approach to God, and if you find it's easier to respect God then you'll learn how to give yourself a little of that love. You can begin the cycle wherever you want, but begin you must. Shabbat is a gift we give our families, Shabbat is a gift we give our friends. Shabbat is a gift we give God, and Shabbat is a gift we give ourselves. Shabbat says you can't be a slave to your work, you need a break. You need a rest. You need to replenish your battery. You need a nap.

Last Shabbat a friend stopped by the house and asked if I wanted to go for a walk. I was just finishing up my Shabbat afternoon nap and I was up for a stroll. We decided to walk by the new house he is building in the neighborhood. It is about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from our home and I was game. So we walked and talked. We talked of my struggles and of his. We talked and we walked and we shared our lives. The house is magnificent. WOW! Then we walked back and we had a cold soda and then he went back to his family. I sat with Missy and one of her friends for a little while, then I made my way into the dining room where our daughter Nina was working on a puzzle and we worked together for a while. Then I went upstairs, changed and went back to services. What an amazing afternoon. Rarely do we get to do it all but we can always do a piece. There are certainly weeks where there's more sleeping and there are weeks when there's more hanging with friends and there are week's when there's more time with the kids, but it all balances out. Sometimes there's more time for prayer and study and sometimes there's more time for walks and sometimes there's just enough time for a quick *l'chaim* at Kiddush. However, none of it will happen unless we decide that we're going to choose to make Shabbat a part of our lives. It means you're going to have to say "no" to activities that you may have been

doing all of your life. At first it may seem as though Shabbat is a new form of slavery, but in time you will grow to taste the liberating joy of Shabbat.

Freedom is it at the core of being an American. There is nothing we hold more central in our lives than the protection of our freedoms. However, I say, there is more to life because I buy into the system of Judaism as a means towards meaningful living. I say freedom to do whatever I want, when I want, isn't so important. To me service is far more sustaining and far more powerful. Shabbat is service to God, it's service to my family, it's service to my friends and it's service to myself. For me, the benefits outweigh the sports events I miss or the errands or chores that will have to be squeezed into another day. Shabbat is filled with demands and it takes tremendous work to get there, but it's worth it. So, when I say the words found at the end of the Amidah,

“Grant me the privilege of the liberating joy of Shabbat, of truly tasting its delights. May I be undisturbed by sorrow during these holy Shabbat hours. Fill my heart with gladness, for to You, Adonai, I offer my entire being. Help me to expand the dimensions of all Shabbat's pleasures, to extend its spirit to the other days of the week. Show me the path of life, the fullness of Your presence, the bliss of being close to You forever. May the one who brings peace to His universe bring peace to us and to all the people Israel.

I feel it in my core. Shabbat is a gift my parents gave me. Now, it's amply clear what the real message is. We must respect God, we must respect each other and, finally, we must respect ourselves. All of these are encapsulated in Shabbat and by observing Shabbat we can do it all. It can begin anywhere you feel comfortable. If you find it's easier to respect others, then you'll learn how to apply that approach to God, and if you find it easier to respect God then you'll learn how to give yourself a little of that love. You can begin the cycle wherever you want, but begin you must. Shabbat is a gift we give our families, Shabbat is a gift we give our friends. Shabbat is a gift we give God. Finally, Shabbat is a gift we give ourselves.

I never like to conclude without giving you a chance to make these words your own. Please turn in your Shabbat brochures to the inside cover and read with me the words we find in the box near the bottom of the page.

“Let us go forth in confidence from this sacred place - and may the blessing of God go with us. Let us take with us the words we have just heard, and may God give us resolve to fill our desires. May God's spirit be with us and with those we love, and may we be granted health and contentment. May God give us strength, hope and vision in a world at peace and let us say Amen.”