

“Shabbos HaGodol”: Illumination from the Shabbos Prior to Creation when the Almighty Chose to Create the World for the Sake of Yisroel!

The holy Shabbos which approaches us auspiciously—the Shabbos immediately preceding Pesach—is known as “Shabbos HaGodol.” The Tur writes (O.C. 430):

“שבת שלפני הפסח קורין אותו שבת הגדול, והטעם לפי שנעשה בו נס גדול, שפסח מצרים מקחו בעשור כדכתיב (שמות יב ג) בעשור לחודש הזה ויקחו להם איש שה לבית אבות שה לבית, ופסח שיצאו ישראל ממצרים היה ביום ה' כדאיתא בסדר עולם, ונמצא שי' בחודש היה שבת, ולקחו להם כל אחד שה לפסחו וקשר אותו בכרעי מטתו, ושאלום המצריים למה זה לכם, והשיבו לשחטו לשם פסח במצות השם עלינו, והיו שיניהם קהות על ששוחטין אלהיהם, ולא היו רשאים לומר להם דבר, ועל שם אותו הנס קורין אותו שבת הגדול.”

The Tur attributes this appellation to the great miracle that occurred on the Shabbos prior to the exodus from Egypt. The exodus took place on a Thursday. On the preceding Shabbos, the tenth of Nissan, every Jew was commanded to take a lamb for his family as a Pesach offering and tie it to the foot of his bed. When the Egyptians would ask curiously about this strange ritual, they would respond that they planned to sacrifice these animals to their G-d. The Egyptians, who worshipped the lamb, were powerless to react and were forced to watch silently.

Another explanation for this appellation, “Shabbos HaGodol,” is presented by the Beis Yosef (ibid.) in the name of the Tosefes (Shabbos 87b):

“ועל כן קורין אותו שבת הגדול לפי שנעשה בו נס גדול, כדאמרין במדרש (שמות רבא פרשת בא) כשלקחו פסחיהם באותה שבת, נתקבצו בכורות אומות העולם אצל ישראל ושאלום למה היו עושין כך, אמרו להן זבח פסח לה' שיהרוג בכורי מצרים, הלכו אצל אבותיהם ואל פרעה לבקש ממנו שישלחו ישראל ולא רצו, ועשו בכורות מלחמה והרגו מהן הרבה, הדא הוא דכתיב למכה מצרים בבכוריהם.”

According to the Medrish, when the people of Yisroel took their lambs for the korban Pesach on that Shabbos, the firstborns of the various nations gathered around Yisroel. They inquired as to the nature of this ritual. They replied that the animals were to be offered to Hashem, Who would then kill the firstborn Egyptians. The firstborns then went to their fathers

and to Pharaoh, beseeching them to send Yisroel away; their request was denied. The firstborns then engaged in battle against their elders and many were killed, as it is written: “to Him Who smote the Egyptians through their firstborns.”

Throughout the generations our scholars and Rabbis have added many more explanations for the designation of Shabbos HaGodol—from the simple, straightforward approaches to the more esoteric and mystical approaches. This is just another illustration of the wonders and breadth of the Written and Oral Laws. So, in honor of the upcoming Shabbos HaGodol, let us offer up a new delicacy of our own to please our Father in Heaven regarding the sages' designation of this Shabbos as Shabbos HaGodol.

“And His Holy Shabbos—He Gave Us” versus “And Your Holy Shabbos--You Gave Us”

Let us begin by examining the formula of the Friday night kiddush instituted by our blessed sages:

“ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצוותיו ורצה בנו, ושבת קדשו באהבה וברצון הנחילנו זכרון למעשה בראשית, (כי הוא יום) תחלה למקראי קודש זכר ליציאת מצרים, (כי בנו בחרת ואותנו קדשת מכל העמים) ושבת קדשך באהבה וברצון הנחלתנו, ברוך אתה ה' מקדש השבת.”

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who sanctified us with His commandments, and was pleased with us, and His holy Shabbos with love and favor He gave us as a heritage, a remembrance of the work of creation; for it is the day that is the prologue to convocations of holiness, a remembrance of the exodus from Egypt. For us did You choose and us did You sanctify from all the nations, and Your holy Shabbos, with love and favor did You give us as a heritage. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who sanctifies the Shabbos.

Note that this formula mentions that HKB”H gave us the Shabbos with love and favor twice—once at the beginning of the berachah and once toward the end. Tosefes (Berachos 46a)

does the power come from that allowed Odom HaRishon and allows all of Yisroel to extend kedusheh from Shabbos to the following six weekdays—even where no preparation was made during the six days prior to Shabbos?

With fear and trepidation let us attempt to explain this matter based on a wonderful insight found in the Zera Kodesh, authored by the great Rabbi of Rophshitz, zy”a, (Chukas), brought in the name of the great Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Rimanov, zy”a. He discusses a teaching from the Zohar hakodesh (Terumoh 156a) that states that on a weekday, the time appropriate to daven Mincheh is a time of “din”—judgment—and not a time of favor. On Shabbos Kodesh, however, the time for Mincheh is a time of favor. This is why we recite the possuk (Tehillim 69, 14) during Mincheh on Shabbos: **“ואני תפלתי לך ה' עת רצון”**—but as for me, my prayer is to You, Hashem, at an opportune time. Hence, we must strive to explain why Mincheh time on Shabbos specifically is an opportune time of favor—referred to as **“רעוא דרעוין”**, the time of ultimate favor and divine will.

He builds on the well-known premise that HKB”H had Yisroel in mind even before the beginning of creation; He intended to create the world for them. The Torah begins (Bereishis 1, 1): **“בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ”**—Bereishis , G-d created the heavens and the earth. Rashi comments: **“בראשית, בשביל ישראל שנקראו ראשית”** alludes to the fact that the Almighty created the world for the sake of Yisroel, who are referred as “reishit,” the first and utmost. Now, the possuk states (ibid. 1, 5): **“ויהי ערב ויהי בוקר”** **“יום אחד”**—and there was evening and there was morning, one day. This teaches us that the world was created prior to the darkness of the first day. This suggests, therefore, that at the time corresponding to Shabbos Mincheh, prior to creation, it was the Holy One’s will to create the world on behalf of Yisroel. Hence, Mincheh time on every Shabbos is considered a time of divine will and favor--**“רעוא דרעוין”**.

This fantastic idea of the great Rabbi of Rimanov, zy”a, is also found in the writings of his student, the Bnei Yissaschar (Shabbosos 8, 1). He utilizes this idea to elucidate the possuk cited above which we recite at Mincheh on Shabbos: **“ואני תפלתי לך ה' עת רצון”**—but as for me, my prayer is to You, Hashem, at an opportune time—based on a passage from the Medrish concerning the creation of the world (B.R. 8, 7):

“רבי יהושע דסכנין בשם רבי שמואל אמר, בנפשותן של צדיקים נמלך, הדא הוא דכתיב (דברי הימים א ד כג) המה היוצרים ויושבי נטעים וגדרה עם המלך במלאכתו ישבו שם... עם המלך מלך מלכי המלכים הקב”ה ישבו נפשות של צדיקים, שבהן נמלך הקב”ה וברא את העולם.”

According to the Medrish, HKB”H consulted with the souls of the righteous tzaddikim before creating the world. This notion is founded on the concept that it is impossible to extend influence from above without an act initiated by the earthly inhabitants down below, involving Torah study and the performance of mitzvot. This concept is expressed by the Zohar hakodesh (Lech Lecho 88a) as follows: **“באתערותא דלתתא אשכח אתערותא לעילא, דהא לא אתער לעילא עד דאתער לתתא”**. If this is indeed so, what prompted HKB”H to create the world. Obviously, before the creation, there were no human beings. So, what compelling action below caused HKB”H to act?

The answer is that prior to creation, HKB”H had Yisroel in mind. In His infinite wisdom, He conceptualized, so to speak, the immense pleasure He would realize from the service of the tzaddikim after creation. Now, we know that HKB”H exists beyond the dimensions of time; the past and the future are no different to Him. So, it was as if these righteous human beings were already there serving Hashem. That was sufficient **אתערותא דלתתא**, stimulation from below to provoke HKB”H from above—even though, in reality, these were only potential acts that had not materialized, yet. This is conveyed by the Medrish’s statement: **“נמלך בנפשותן של צדיקים, המה היוצרים ויושבי נטעים וגדרה עם המלך מלכו של עולם”**—the King of the universe consulted with the souls of the righteous.

Now, we have already explained that it was precisely at the time of Mincheh on Shabbos that HKB”H’s will to create the world originated. That is when He envisioned how Yisroel would serve Hashem. That aroused HKB”H’s will to create the world. That, then, is the implication of the possuk: **“ואני”**—we, Your people, Yisroel, who You envisioned favorably at Mincheh time on Shabbos, eliciting Your desire to create the world; **“תפלתי לך ה' עת רצון”**—we pray to You at this auspicious time, which was revealed in our merit; **“אלקים ברב חסדך ענני באמת; ישעך”**—answer us, G-d, with Your abundant kindness and Your true salvation.

The Existence of the World Is Renewed for Six More Days on Every Shabbos

Based on this incredible idea from the great Rabbi of Rimanov, zy”a, we can substantiate the Ohr HaChaim hakodesh’s famous principle (Bereishis 2, 3) regarding Shabbos. Elucidating the possuk (Shemos 20, 11): **“כי ששת ימים עשה ה' את השמים ואת הארץ”**, he notes astutely that the word **“ששת”** was used and not **“בששת”**. Thus, the possuk states that HKB”H created the world to exist for only six days—not that the process of creation took place over a six day period. Nevertheless, when Yisroel observe Shabbos every week, we perpetuate the Shabbos

itself. By doing so, we renew the world's contract to exist for another six days. In this manner, Odom HaRishon observed and kept the very first Shabbos. His observance renewed the world's existence for another six days. This process repeats itself weekly, on every Shabbos, throughout the days of time.

According to this scenario, how were the first six days of creation created without a Shabbos preceding them and guaranteeing their existence. Without a doubt, HKB"H could have created the world without the device of Shabbos. Nonetheless, it is an accepted principle that whatever HKB"H established during the six days of creation formed a basis and blueprint for the way the world was to be conducted forevermore. That being the case how is it possible that the first six days of creation were created without a Shabbos preceding them?

In light of the great Rabbi of Rimanov's incredible explanation, this problem is not so perplexing. For, as we have seen, HKB"H, as it were, observed Shabbos—together with the souls of the tzaddikim of Yisroel, for whose sake He created the world—one day before the six days of creation. It is with the power of that Shabbos that HKB"H created the world during the following six days. That established the pattern and procedure for the remainder of time in this world. On every Shabbos, the existence of the world is renewed for six more weekdays.

How beautifully this fits with the Baal HaTurim's commentary on the possuk (Bereishis 1, 1): **"בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ" - "בראשית אתות יר"א שב"ת, לומר לך שבזכות שבת "בראשית" נברא העולם.** The word "בראשית" is an anagram for "ירא שבת", which means one who reveres Shabbos. Thus, the first possuk in the Torah can be understood as telling us that the world owes its creation and existence to the observance of Shabbos. This notion obviously requires further explanation. What is the significance of Shabbos other than representing the seventh day of creation? Yet, based on what we have just explained, we can suggest that HKB"H alluded to us with the very first word of the Torah--**"בראשית" - יר"א שב"ת**--that a Shabbos existed before the six days of creation. It was specifically with the force of that Shabbos that: **"ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ"**--G-d created the heavens and the earth during the six days of creation.

A Source from the Writings of the Ramak Regarding the Shabbos the Preceded Creation

Come and see how the Almighty has in fact provided us with a wonderful source for this incredible and novel idea of the great Rabbi of Rimanov's, zy"ā. In Pardes Rimonim, authored

by the divine kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, he writes that a spiritual concept of the Shabbos day existed beyond the dimension of time, even before the world was created. Additionally, from that Shabbos, HKB"H drew the sustaining force for the six days of creation. He also explains that the order of time predated creation. Here are his sacred words:

"והנה עם זה יובן ספק גדול הנופל במעשה בראשית, והוא אמרם שלא היתה בריאה ביום השביעי, [מתמה על כך הרמ"ק], ולמה, שכבר היתה בריאת יום השבת בעצמו, שהיום בעצמו צריך בריאה, [כלומר הלא גם יום השבת עצמו צריך בריאה]. שכן אמר בזה כי ששת ימים עשה ה', ששת קאמר ולא בששת, משמע ששת עצמן עשה ה', והיינו בריאת שמים וארץ שהם ששת שהן כוללות שש קצוות, ואם כן לפי זה כבר היתה בריאת שבת בעצמו ואם כן איך שבת ונח ביום ז', אלא ודאי שבת קדמה לעולם, ואלו שבת שנותן כוח בששת ימים לא היה בהן כוח לפעול."

Here he also addresses another interesting question. Since Hashem rested on the seventh day and nothing new was created on the seventh day, when was Shabbos created? Certainly, Shabbos already existed and had already been created. In fact, it existed before the world was created; and if not for the influence of Shabbos, the other six days of the week would have been nonproductive and lacked any functional effect.

We find another early source for this concept in Sefer Chachmoni, authored by Rabbi Shabtai Donolo, in his commentary on Sefer Yetzirah (end of chapter 4):

"בתחלה טרם כל ימי השבוע נברא יום שבת באות ב', כי בטרם שהתחיל האלקים לבראות את העולם שבת היה, ובמוצאי יום שבת ההוא התחיל אלקים לעשות מלאכה בעולם, וכל ששת הימים עשה מלאכה ובערב שבת כלה מלאכתו, וביום השביעי שבת בו עוד כמטרם בריית העולם."

He states that the Shabbos day was created prior to the other days of the week; and it was created with the letter "bet." Then, on motzaei Shabbos, G-d began the work of creation; his work ceased on erev Shabbos.

Alas, we have succeeded in finding a solution to Chiyeh bar Av's point of view. He held that a person lost in spiritual desolation: **"משמר יום אחד ומונה ששה"**—observes one day and counts six. By following this procedure, he extends the sanctity of the Shabbos to the following six weekdays—even when there was no service of Hashem in the six days that preceded the Shabbos. Based on what we have learned, we can propose that every Jew possesses the power to draw kedusheh from that very same Shabbos whose existence preceded the creation of the heavens and the earth. Clearly, no work or service or six

days of preparation preceded that Shabbos. On the contrary, that Shabbos provided the sustaining force for the six days of creation during which HKB”H created the world.

This concept can be applied very nicely to our blessed sages’ statement in the Gemoreh (Beroches 34b): **“מקום שבעלי תשובה: עומדין, צדיקים גמורים אינם עומדין”**—in the place the penitents stand, the totally righteous do not stand. We can view this statement as an allusion to the different avenues available to ba’alei teshuvah and tzaddikim with regards to Shabbos. Ba’alei teshuvah who did not prepare adequately during the six weekdays have the ability to repent and to begin the process of tikun on Shabbos, following the procedure of: **“משמר יום אחד”**—observing one day and counting six. In effect they are connecting with and drawing from the sanctity of the Shabbos that preceded the creation—which exists beyond the dimension of time. Those who are thoroughly righteous, however, and serve Hashem during the six days of the week, are able to draw kedusheh from the seventh day that follows the six days of the work week.

The Special Gift in HKB”H’s Treasure Room Is the Shabbos that Predated Creation

This discussion also sheds some light on the Gemoreh’s (Shabbos 10b) elucidation of the possuk (Shemos 31, 13): **“לדעת כי אני ה’ מקדשכם, אמר לו הקב”ה למשה, מתנה טובה יש לי”**—HKB”H informs Moshe that he has a special gift in His treasure-room intended for Yisroel; its name is Shabbos. Seemingly, this presents a slight difficulty. For, the Gemoreh (Shabbos 87b) taught us that they were already given the mitzvah of Shabbos in Marah. If so, why did the Holy One wish to give Yisroel Shabbos a second time?

Yet, based on what we have learned, HKB”H is alluding to an entirely different Shabbos with his statement: **“מתנה טובה יש לי”**—I have a special gift in my treasure-room and it is called Shabbos. That Shabbos was kept concealed and stored away solely for the Holy One, even before creation, beyond the realm of time. He now informs Moshe that the time has come to give it to Yisroel, so that they may connect with its power and kedusheh. This is indeed a very special gift. For, even someone who is lost in a spiritual wilderness and has not prepared properly for Shabbos, nevertheless he is able to draw upon the kedusheh from the Shabbos that predated creation. For, that Shabbos imparted kedusheh to the six days of the following week without any preparation before it.

At this point, we can rejoice that we can finally shed some light on the matter of the repetitive formula of the kiddush. We saw that the giving of the Shabbos to Yisroel as a heritage is mentioned twice in the kiddush. Yet, at the beginning of the kiddush, the formula employs third person syntax: **“ושבת קדשו”**—**“באהבה וברצון הנחילנו”**—the Shabbos is described as being His. Here the formula is alluding to the Shabbos that predated the creation of the world; a Shabbos that was not apparent to any living creature. After all, Odom HaRishon was yet to be created.

For endowing us with that Shabbos, we express our gratitude to HKB”H with the words: **“ושבת קדשו באהבה וברצון הנחילנו”**—and His holy Shabbos He gave to us lovingly and with favor. He bequeathed to us that Shabbos that existed before the creation of the world—that special gift that had been stored away in His treasure-room—so that we would possess the ability to extend sanctity to the six days of the week to come. Therefore, the next words in the formula of the kiddush are: **“וזכרון למעשה בראשית”**—in other words, it is a reminder that the six days of creation drew their power and sustenance from the Shabbos that predated creation. As we have seen, the word **“בראשית”** which is an anagram for **“ירא שב”ת”** alludes to this phenomenon.

Toward the conclusion of the kiddush, however, the formula instituted employs second person syntax: **“ושבת קדשך באהבה וברצון הנחלתנו”**—and Your Shabbos You gave to us as a heritage lovingly and with favor. In this instance, it is referring to “Shabbos Bereishis,” the Shabbos that culminated the week of creation. That Shabbos was revealed and experienced by Odom HaRishon, Hevel and Kayin. To indicate that we are now referring to the Shabbos that was apparent and not concealed, the formula switches from the third person to the second person—connoting a degree of familiarity.

On “Shabbos HaGodol” We Draw from the Shabbos that Predated the Creation

Continuing on along this exalted path, let us now address the reason underlying the choice of the designation “Shabbos HaGodol” to commemorate the Shabbos on which Yisroel took the animals for their Pesach offering. The possuk states (Shemos 12, 21): **“ויקרא משה לכל זקני ישראל ויאמר אליהם, משכו וקחו לכם צאן למשפחותיכם ושחטו הפסח”**—Moshe called to all the elders of Yisroel. He said to them: Draw away and take for yourselves sheep for your families—and slaughter the Pesach offering. Rashi explains (ibid. 6) in the name of the Mechilta: **“ולפי שהיו שטופים בעבודת כוכבים אמר להם משכו וקחו לכם, משכו ידיכם מעבודת כוכבים וקחו לכם צאן של מצוה”**—because

they were engulfed in idol-worship, they were instructed to withdraw their hands from idols and false gods and take a lamb for the sake of a mitzvah.

We see that until that Shabbos day, the tenth of Nissan, on which they took the lambs and goats for their Pesach offerings, they worshipped the Egyptian deity, the lamb. By taking a lamb, in order to sacrifice it as a korban Pesach to Hashem, they demonstrated that they were withdrawing their hands from idolatry. We can deduce, therefore, that in the six days preceding that momentous Shabbos, they did not perform any acts of preparation for Shabbos; for, they were still steeped in idolatry. Despite their lack of appropriate preparation, HKB”H still commanded them to sever their associations with idol-worship specifically on Shabbos. By doing so, they could draw upon the kedusheh of Shabbos to help them connect with Hashem and to extend kedusheh to the next six days after that Shabbos.

At this point, the inquisitive son asks: From where did Yisroel draw the force of kedusheh on that Shabbos? After all, that kedusheh depends on the preparation performed during the previous six weekdays.

In truth, we have already learned the answer to this question. Every Jew possesses the power to connect with the original Shabbos, the Shabbos that predated the six days of creation, the Shabbos on which HKB”H decided to create the world in the merit of Yisroel. For on that historic Shabbos, at the conclusion of the Egyptian exile, they were privileged to draw upon the kedusheh from the original Shabbos that predated the six days of creation. By detaching themselves from idolatry and actively taking a lamb for a korban Pesach, they acquired the power to draw upon the sanctity of Shabbos alone—even without the merit and preparation of the six work days preceding it.

Now, thanks to the graces of Hashem, we can propose a novel reason for the designation “Shabbos HaGodol.” This name alludes to the fact that on that extraordinary Shabbos, Yisroel drew upon the kedusheh of the original Shabbos that predated creation. Viewed in this light, the description “Shabbos HaGodol” indicates the preeminence of that Shabbos above all other Shabbosos—either because (a) it exists beyond the realm of time and was the wellspring for all of creation or (b) it is the principal and original Shabbos in the world. We find an analogous designation for the head of a family as “gadol habayit” in the Gemoreh (Moed Koton 21b).

“Who Smote the Egyptians through Their Firstborn” in the Merit of the Union of HKB”H with Bnei Yisroel

Based on this novel idea, I would also like to address the reason Tosefes give for the appellation Shabbos HaGodol. According to Tosefes the designation Shabbos HaGodol is related to the miracle that occurred on that Shabbos involving the firstborn Egyptians. They waged a bloody battle against their fathers and many of them were killed, as it says: **“למכה—מצרים בכוריהם”**—Who smote the Egyptians through their firstborn. We must endeavor to explain why it was heavenly ordained that the firstborn Egyptians battled their fathers specifically on that particular Shabbos.

Let us explain the matter in the following manner. It is written (Shemos 4, 22): **“כה אמר ה' בני בכורי ישראל”**—so said Hashem, My firstborn son is Yisroel. The Chizkuni (ibid.) explains that all of the nations of the world are Hashem’s children; however, Yisroel is dearest to Hashem and are considered His firstborn, because He thought to create them before any other nation. The Ohev Yisroel (Beshalach) and the author of the Tanya (Likutei Amorim 2) provide similar explanations for Yisroel’s designation as Hashem’s firstborn son.

As we have explained, on that first Shabbos HaGodol, Yisroel took their korban Pesach lambs and, by so doing, connected with the kedusheh of the original Shabbos that predated the creation. It was on that original, prestigious Shabbos that HKB”H first conceived of Yisroel and the idea to create the world on their behalf. With that initial conception a unique bond was forged between HKB”H and the souls of Yisroel that He envisioned. For this reason, they are referred to as: **“בני בכורי ישראל”**—my firstborn child, Yisroel.

There is a well-known principle expressed by Rashi on the possuk (Bereishis 25, 23): **“ולאום מלאום יאמץ - לא ישוו בגדולה כשזה קם זה נופל”** This possuk deals with the balance of powers in this world between Yaakov and his descendants versus Eisav and his descendants. We learn here that when the side of kedusheh rises, the side of tumah falls. On the original Shabbos HaGodol, Yisroel connected with the kedusheh of the paramount Shabbos that preceded the creation of the world. On that Shabbos HKB”H conceived the idea of Yisroel above all else. As a result, a unique bond was established between HKB”H, our Father in Heaven, and His firstborn son, Yisroel. This meteoric rise on the side of kedusheh on the original Shabbos HaGodol spelled disaster for the side of tumah. As a result, the firstborn Egyptians waged battle against their fathers and were struck a deadly blow.

לזכות ולרפואה שלימה של בניציון בן רחל ושמואל אהרן הי"ו