

CREATION & RECREATION

The sermon given for this Shabbat dealt with the question of Shabbat.

First I gave the definition of Melakhah, as derived from the propinquity of Shabbat to Mishkan, as melekhet machshevet, i.e., creative change in nature. I explained the importance of this as a method of acknowledging God's ownership and ultimate title to the universe. The result of this is: responsibility to the world, nature, one's possessions (as exemplified by ecology), sharing with the poor, and a humble attitude towards wealth.

In support or illustration of this point, I quoted the remark by Rabbeny Bachya ben Asher in his Kad Hakemach. On the verse beini u'bein b'nai Yisrael ot hi le-olam, which usually is translated as, "between Me and the children of Israel this (the Sabbath) shall be a sign forever" (and this is, of course, the true translation, because the word olam in biblical Hebrew always is temporal rather than spatial), Rabbenu Bachya maintains that a subsidiary meaning of the word is the spatial dimension -- i.e., "between Me and the children of Israel this (the Sabbath) is a sign for the world," that God created and has absolute right over the world, and that He lends it as a trust to mankind, and the children of Israel must acknowledge this ownership and this responsibility towards the world, to tame it but never wreck it, to subdue it but never destroy it, by observing the Sabbath.

After this I went into the definition of menucha in its two forms, shevitah and nofesh, as developed in my booklet for the J.E.C. The Sabbath: Model for a Theory of Leisure, part of which I published in the Yavneh Shiron. As examples of nofesh, I gave: unrushed prayer (Ramban: Mikraei Kodesh) and the study of Torah (quoting Rabbi Akiva to the effect that the Torah was given on the Sabbath). Then I led into a psychological difference between shevitah and nofesh: shevitah, taken in the wrong way, can develop into the kind of day Philo described: a chance for reinvigoration so as the better to work during the six following days. But this would logically lead to the Christian transformation, i.e., that of the Sabbath on the first day of the week, to signify that its purpose is to rest up for the rest of the week. However, the understanding of nofesh, or for that matter the correct interpretation of shevitah, places the Sabbath at the end of the week, because the entire week has as its end or purpose the Sabbath. The word "end" is here taken in both its significations. From this I went on to the Abarbanel on vayekhulu, with the proof text from ata kidashta... takhlit maaseh shamayim va-aretz.

I closed by referring the concepts of shevitah and nofesh to the words vayevarekh elokim es yom ha-sheviyi va-yekadesh oto. According to Saadia Gaon, this refers not to the Sabbath as such, but to those who observe the Sabbath, that they will be both blessed and sanctified. If we observe shevitah, genuine and authentic relaxation

in the Sabbath spirit, we will appreciate that we are the recipients of va-yevarekh. And if we rise to a higher level, that of recreation or nofesh, then we will perceive that we are even more, the recipients of va-yekadesh.