

Shavuos (Day 2) - The Quality of life

Category: Holidays, Shavuos

What does the story of King David teach us about life?

Usually, I get up here and speak. Today I'm going to get up here and sing.

["Eliyahu HaNavi, Eliyahu HaTishbi...] Okay, that's enough for now.

Does anybody recognize that tune? Many of you might.

It's "Eliyahu HaNavi," the song traditionally sung after Shabbos is over, immediately after Havdalah. The words mean that we are asking that G-d send Eliyahu HaNavi, Elijah the Prophet, to come down from Heaven and give us the good news that Moshiach is coming.

But why do we sing this song on Motzaei Shabbos, when Shabbos is over?

When Will I Die?

One of the explanations comes from the Talmud (Tractate Eiruvim 43b), which states that Moshiach can never come on a Shabbos—and so therefore, immediately after Shabbos ends, we again ask G-d that He send Eliyahu to tell us that Moshiach is coming.

But there's another reason for the connection between Moshiach and Motzaei Shabbos.

There is a mitzvah to eat a special meal after Shabbos. This meal is known in Kabbalistic texts as the Seudasa D'Dovid Malka Meshicha, or the Feast of David, the Anointed King. Generally, it is known as Melaveh Malkah, or the Queen's Send-Off—it's a farewell meal to the Shabbos Queen. But that's a different subject.

Now why is it called Seudasa D'Dovid Malka Meshicha? The Talmud tells us something very interesting. King David asked G-d how long he'd live—he asked G-

d to tell him exactly which day and what time he'd die so that he'd be able to plan his entire life's schedule, arrange all his vacations accordingly, throw Bar Mitzvah parties, and so on. After all, knowing when you are going to die would make it all so much easier to put everything on the calendar—so long as your great aunt's funeral doesn't interrupt your vacation in Las Vegas.

But G-d told King David, "It is a decree before Me that we do not make known the end of flesh and blood"—it's classified information; no man can know when it will happen.

So King David asked G-d to at least tell him what day of the week it would be, and G-d told him that it would be on a Shabbos. From then on, on every Saturday night, King David would throw a huge feast and celebrate greatly that he had one more week in which to live and do mitzvos here in this world. And that's why the Motzaei Shabbos seudah is called the Feast of King David.

In general, the three Shabbos meals—Friday night, Shabbos day and Shabbos later afternoon—correspond to the three Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. But the Melavah Malkah meal, as mentioned, corresponds to King David.

King David's Life

The reason we are talking about David HaMelech today on Shavuos is because the Talmud (Tractate Beitzah) tells us, "David died on Atzeres," which is another name for the holiday of Shavuos. And so Shavuos is King David's yahrzeit.

Does anybody know how old King David was when he passed away?

King David was 70 years old when he died.

How old was Adam, the first human being, created by G-d's own Hand, when he died? The Torah tells us that Adam was 930 years old when he died.

This seems to be a strange number. It's not a round number. It's not like 900 or 1000. What is it about the specific number of 930?

So the Zohar tells us that G-d showed Adam all of history to follow him, as if it were one long movie. "When Adam saw that David had no years allotted to him at all, he was shocked, and he gave him 70 of his own years."

Adam saw that King David was destined to die in childbirth. He was supposed to be a stillborn baby. But he saw that King David was supposed to accomplish great things in life—but for whatever reason, no years were allotted to him to live. So he turned to G-d and asked, “Is there a present in Heaven?” In other words, can you give someone not yet born a gift? So when G-d told Adam yes, Adam asked to give King David 70 years of his own life. (Adam was supposed to live to 1,000.)

Who Lived Longer?

But when we compare King David’s life to that of Adam, we discover something interesting: Adam lived for 930 years, which is about the lifetimes of ten different people put together—but for all that time, what do we know about Adam’s life? How many stories have we heard about Adam? We pretty much know only one story: The day on which he was created and on which he ate from the Tree of Knowledge and was thrown out of the Garden of Eden—and little more.

King David, on the other hand, lived only 70 years—but we’ve heard plenty about him! We know about how he defeated Goliath, became a king, led wars, ruled Israel, and on top of all that was “the Sweet Singer of Israel” who composed Tehilim, the Book of Psalms, the original prayer book of the Jewish Nations. He also was “the Builder of Jerusalem”—he laid the groundwork for the eventual building of the Temple, and so on and so forth. You could talk forever about how much King David accomplished.

But why indeed do we have no story about Adam? It must be that Adam didn’t do anything special that had an effect on the world and on future generations. There was nothing that justified being recorded in the Torah. It’s clear that he did many good things and lived an upright life and never hurt anyone, G-d forbid. But as far as the historical record is concerned, that wasn’t enough—he just didn’t do anything that affected the course of history (besides eating the Forbidden Fruit, that is), and so there is no story about him.

Which is not the case with King David: He was constantly busy working for the good of the Jewish People. He didn’t try to live a quiet life for himself. Rather, he tried constantly to affect the world, to make a difference, and so even though he only lived 70 years, we still remember him at every possible opportunity—to the extent that we all know the song “Dovid Melech Yisrael, Chai V’Kayam.” This is a

song not sung for anyone else in Jewish history.

Yizkor

This contrast, my friends, is supposed to teach us something.

It's clear that we wish everyone long life until age 120. But what's more important is that they be productive years—years in which you don't just worry about yourself but also about the people around you. So we need to try to not waste our years but rather, to use them in ways that will be remembered forever.

We soon will be reciting the Yizkor prayer. At that time, it's appropriate to contemplate the lives of those for whom we say Yizkor—to remember all the good deeds they did and to learn from them how to use one's time wisely and how to ensure that we'll be less like Adam and more like King David.