



A whole NEW WORLD

BY LEONARD CARR

Tapping into the Shalom of Shabbat



THE VISION OF THIS COLUMN, PROJECT SHALOM, was to try and restore a meaningful, nuanced understanding of this quality, which is fundamental to a fulfilling material, emotional, and spiritual life. For my ultimate article before I take my sabbatical from *Jewish Life*, it is fitting that I explore the concept of Shalom as it expresses itself through true honouring of Shabbos. Shalom is integral to the experience of Shabbos. The centrality of peace on Shabbos is embodied in the greeting and blessing of Shalom that we extend to each other on Shabbos. Our very prayers coalesce into the blessing of peace.

The week begins with Havdalah, literally making distinctions, forging separation. During the week, just like Hashem did in

the six days of creation, we work with diverse aspects and parts of life to gain mastery over our physical existence and to make the world more hospitable for ourselves. The weekday world is a realm of objects to be created, classified, arranged, controlled, and organised. It is the reality dominated by overcoming obstacles to achieve goals and objectives. It is the time that we create order in what would otherwise be a hostile and inhospitable world. There is the potential within this weekday reality that we may start to experience ourselves and others as machines or mere suppliers of goods and services, in other words, as a means to an end.

Over time we also come to perceive ourselves as the pinnacle of our world,

alone in the endless competition for survival. We may succumb to feeling complacent or smug when we are winning, or abandoned and persecuted when we do not feel that we are overcoming life's challenges. We can forget that the purpose of building this material home in the world is so that we can transition to becoming guests in Hashem's world on Shabbos, through the way we sanctify and subsist on the resources we acquired during the week.

It often seems as if too many people wish to homogenise all experience and reduce life to the economics of time and the efficiency of production. It is as if they are intent upon taking all richness out of life and domesticating the exotic. Even relationships and the most elevated expressions of spirituality like blessings, prayer, weddings, and funerals are rendered humdrum, sterile, and mechanical. Gestures that could transport us to great heights of connection and closeness become mere mind-numbing tick box exercises to be gotten out of the way to make space for the next important equally mundane activity.

The concepts of mindfulness and being fully present, that rightfully belongs in this domain of the sacred, has been reduced, commoditised, and popularised into techniques or devices by many who lack real insight into the way of being that informs the practices. Progress and success is measured by how much of this you can pull-off in the shortest time. This spawns a world devoid of true relationship and of intimacy. A world in the words of Jane Austen, "Life seems but a quick succession of busy nothings."

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We initiate Shabbos by sanctifying the wine and bread that we acquired through our labour during the week. It is through this that the weekday toil gains deeper meaning and significance. Through the keeping of Shabbos we reaffirm weekly Hashem's role as the Creator. In so doing, we also rededicate our role as partners with Him, in co-creating a world in which we and those around us can feel fully at home. Each Shabbos affords an opportunity to encounter the world in its totality, perceiving the grandeur of creation with awe and wonder. We are invited to encounter existence in a new way, to literally refresh our experience of life. We welcome Shabbos as a bride, with whom we recommit and rededicate our lives to the pursuit of higher meaning as opposed to material pre-occupations and worries. The quality of engagement that we strive to personify on Shabbos is the quality of intimacy, through which we create a sacred space for ourselves and others and through which we encounter the sanctity of the day.

The intimate space is the extraordinary realm of the sacred. To be intimate means to find a place of serenity, refuge, solace. It implies a quality of connection that can only happen in a consciously created and protected domain that is distinct and insulated from the ordinary and the everyday. It is the place where the familiar is viewed as novel, through new, curious, and appreciative eyes. It is a context where surprise is welcomed, newness savoured, and differences explored, played with, embraced, reconciled, or celebrated; where self and other are merged into magical alchemy that creates a unique sense of oneness. It is a space that needs to be renewed and refreshed, entered always as if for the first time. If it is treated casually, as a rote exercise, overextended, or with a jaded approach, it immediately reverts to the overly-familiar, ordinary, and run-of-the-mill. As Shakespeare said, "If all the year were playing holidays, To sport would be as tedious as to work."

Intimacy is a sublime experience of the sacred. It intersperses and infuses periods or even moments of richness and meaning into the otherwise banal de-

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mands and challenges of everyday life. Sacred literally means elevated through being set apart and designated for an exclusive purpose. The sacred is the vantage point from where all of life in all its complexity, intricacy and infinite variety gains special significance and meaning. An intimate engagement raises the bar and enriches and gives significance and meaning to ordinary existence.

The intimate or sacred domain is announced by the crossing of a clear threshold. Once crossed, it leaves the mundane behind a clearly demarcated boundary that also protects this space. This threshold can be inaugurated through ceremony and celebration. An authentic celebration is framed by a clear sense of purpose. Through ritual and ceremony, people's intentions and actions are shaped and steered towards honouring and experiencing the meaning and purpose of the celebration. Participants are drawn in to become immersed and absorbed in the process, so as to be fully engaged and able to access the transformative richness and benefit of the experience.

Shabbos is something that needs to be kept in mind, anticipated, and prepared for in advance. We remember Shabbos during the week by preparing for the coming Shabbos. This maintains our awareness of the goal of the working week. By cherishing the idea and longing for the arrival of Shabbos, we can stay attuned and remain conditioned to straddling mutually dependant realities that underpin the uniquely Jewish experience of creation. We also can remember Shabbos by bringing intimacy and moments of sacredness into our weekday reality.

This is done by making time for yourself and the people around you to be in that exclusive encounter where, for the time it lasts, the rest of the world is left outside, relegated to the for-now unimportant. Erev-Shabbos is a threshold that you need to arrive at as opposed to rush past and miss in your haste to "make it" to Shab-

bos. The threshold is the place where you stand and prepare yourself for an experience or frame of mind that is different from the ordinary, everyday way of being. It is the place where you stand in preparation to make the transition from everyday reality to the realm of the sacred.

Upon truly entering Shabbos, you embark on a new reality, a new relationship with life, with yourself, and with others. It is the appreciation of the significance of thresholds and your conduct at the boundary that marks the difference between perceiving and acting towards others as if they are mere commodities or sacred unique manifestations of G-d's image. With this sensibility, you meet your own inner-reality and the world of others as a host meets a guest.

As a good host, you show up with your entire being in attendance, observing, listening, sensing, and feeling. You use your warmth, openness, vulnerability of being receptive and responsive. Instead of controlling or dominating, you try to discern how best you may draw out the experience and inner world of the people around you. You host the feelings and inspiration that arise within you, to fully connect with the pleasure of simply being you in each moment. You greet feelings and ideas with interest, surprise, and curiosity, as opposed to contest, judgment, or evaluation.

The pleasure of enjoying and being enjoyed by others who are just being there, not working, referring to past, present, or future, but surrendering to the serenity and enjoyment of the day. You open yourself to and offer to others the feeling of being found, felt, recognised, and valued for simply being themselves. Through this magnificent encounter we become to each other more real, human, and connected. In the relationship of host and guest that we enter into on Shabbos, we mutually recognise and appreciate the true meaning of the human being as created in the image of the Divine. **IL**