

Is there a vaccine for a mid-life crisis?

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The mention of Shabbat at the beginning of our parsha is taken by the Talmud (Yevamos 6b¹) to be letting us know that the Beit Din (Jewish court) does not meet on Shabbat. This concept seems to come specifically from the fact that one may not light a fire, taken to include the fire which would be used in the death penalty of *sreifah*, and then extended to all court punishments. Rav Yeshaya Horowitz (the Shlah haKadosh) explains the root reason behind this is that punishment is inherently incompatible with Shabbat. As we say in the Shabbat zemirot, Shabbat is *M'Ein Olam HaBah*, a microcosm of the next world. The Shlah explains that the next world is to enjoy the reward we will get from the mitzvot and is not a place where we will be judged and punished. Since this is true of Olam HaBah it is also true of Shabbat.

Aside from giving halachic guidance about the character of Shabbat this construct seems to have more far reaching implications. On a basic level we can ask what is the purpose of having a glimpse of the next world each week? I want to suggest a possibility and introduce it with a story. Alfred Nobel was making a lot of money. He had invented a way to stabilize explosives so they could be harnessed. He called his product dynamite. One day he opened up the paper and saw his own obituary. You see, newspaper offices had obituaries written up and ready to go on many famous personalities. Alfred's brother had died and they mistakenly ran Alfred's obituary instead. Alfred had something of a mid-life crisis when he read his obituary. He saw himself being remembered for inventing dynamite and amassing a fortune but not much else. He decided to leave a legacy in the form of awards which would recognize people which had made great contributions to the world in a number of categories. It would be known as the Nobel prize. Alfred wanted to make sure he was remembered for something more than dynamite and I would say he did a pretty fantastic job².

Reading ones obituary is a very effective way of inducing them to think about their future. However, this is akin to shooting a tire out to get a car to slow down. It is very effective but also extremely dangerous. Another way of slowing down the car which is much safer is to put a stop sign in the road. Shabbat is that atop sign. Shabbat makes us slow down and consider our priorities and trajectory for the upcoming week. It never allows us to get too far without a pause. This is perhaps another facet of Shabbat being a microcosm of the next world. Shabbat is a weekly focus on the ext world, on remembering where we are headed and how we will get there.

Rashi (Shemos 20:9) quotes the Midrash that when Shabbat arrives we should consider it as if all of our work is complete. Simply this should mean that we must not worry about all of our unfinished tasks and instead be able to really accept Shabbat with tranquility. On another

¹ See also Talmud Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin 4:6)

² See more about Alfred's life at http://www.nobelprize.org/alfred_nobel/

level perhaps we are also being told that we must recall that one day our work will really be complete in a way where we will never get to work on it again. We really have no control over when this day will be and so we must be reminded of this on a consistent basis. Instead of having a crisis at a point when we may not be able to marshal the courage and resources to turn our lives around, we are asked to experience the end goal each week and make sure we are always on the oath to get there.