THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT: Shabbat, what I want vs. what I need.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day [is a day of] rest [dedicated] to HaShem your God… you shall not do any work (Exodus, Shemot, 20: 8-11)

Of all the Ten Commandments, Shabbat seems to be the most far-reaching in its practical application. We must stop working, stop taking care of our livelihood, one-seventh of our lives. Bearing in mind, also when we work, our dependency with HaShem. In this way, we make from Shabbat a "sacred", special, different and spiritual day.

The spirituality of Shabbat begins by understanding why we should refrain from work on this day. And the key, I think, is in the text that tells us about the "Man," the first indication we had as a people about the essence of Shabbat.

Let's see. After leaving Egypt, the people of Israel suffered shortages of food and water in the desert. HaShem makes the manna (in Hebrew "Man", a special food that had all the necessary nutritional properties) descend from heaven. And He tells the people of Israel how to behave with respect to the "Man." These instructions are primarily educational. They teach the Jewish people how to manage with the material assets.

There are three basic instructions about gathering the "Man", from which we can learn a great lesson in Jewish spiritual economy. And all these lessons are related to Shabbat.

WHERE DO I GET MY FOOD FROM? First, the manna teaches us that food, the satisfaction of our material needs, comes from heaven (= God). That does not mean that we should not work to earn our bread. In fact, the fourth commandment virtually commands us to work. What the Tora wants, then, it is to educate us on the fundamental idea that ultimately our sustenance (parnasa) is determined from "heaven". The farmer can work from sunup to sundown sowing his land, but if "heaven" does not provide rain, he will not have what to eat. An entrepreneur can be very intelligent and hardworking, but if he has an accident, or is the victim of a terminal illness, he cannot continue working. Our work must be accompanied by the Emuna (=conviction) that ultimately is HaShem who determines what I'll have. This is the main idea of Shabbat: our livelihood, same as the manna, depends on HaShem's will.

YOU SHALL NOT ACCUMULATE: The second lesson has to do with the rejection of a compulsive accumulation of material goods. In the desert, it was forbidden to accumulate "Man". Each person had to pick only the "Man" needed for him/her and their family for that day. If someone picked up more "Man" than he needed, the extra "Man" rotted. This lesson is extremely important: in the world, there is food for everyone. As a Jew, I do not need to look at my neighbor as my rival, as if the more he has, the less I will have, or vice versa. Abandoning the idea of accumulating disproportionate supplies represents an expression of trust, appreciation, and gratitude for the generosity of HaShem. We must work to collect the "Man", but knowing that the "Man" we gather is a gift from heaven.

NOT DURING SHABBAT : On Friday people collected a double portion of Man, for Friday and for Shabbat. Why? Because the Man did not descend during Shabbat. People did not have to come out (and could not come out) to work / collect their food on Shabbat. Every Jew who observes the Shabbat knows very well the importance of this lesson. One can lose many job offers, only for not being willing to work on the Seventh day of the

week. In many cases, a Jewish businessman must sacrifice potentially 20% or 25% (or sometimes more) of his sells during the week, because on Shabbat he cannot continue his business. Shabbat, as once observed by the Romans, is not a genius "commercial" idea. But, is there a better way to express my confidence in HaShem's capacity to bless me? Is there a better way to show my conviction that by working one day more I'll not necessarily have more than what HaShem will determine for myself and my family?

To be continued.