

**Maimonides 613 Series**  
*Yisro: Why We Make Havdala*

זְכוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ:

“Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it.”<sup>[1]</sup>

**Positive Commandment No. 155**

The Rambam teaches: It is a positive commandment to sanctify the Shabbos and make a verbal declaration when the Shabbos enters and when it leaves. We are required to declare the Shabbos's greatness and to mention its distinctness from the other days of the week. The Rambam's Scriptural source for this commandment is our verse from Parshas Yisro, “Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it.”

The Mechilta taught that we fulfill our obligation to “remember and sanctify” the Shabbos by reciting a blessing. Our Sages expounded on this, teaching that we should “remember” over wine. Therefore, we make Friday night Kiddush over a cup of wine, which declares the uniqueness of Shabbos and concludes with a blessing. The Sages further taught that our obligation to “remember and sanctify” the Shabbos extends to its leaving, as well, by reciting Havdala on Saturday night.

**Havdala as separation**

The recitation of Havdala, which, like Kiddush, proclaims the Shabbos's greatness, distinguishes and separates the holiness of Shabbos from the other days' mundaneness. Havdala includes blessings over wine, spices, fire, and the distinction of Shabbos. Because Havdala officially marks the Shabbos' departure and the entry of a normal weekday, it is generally considered to be an agent of *separation*. Two provisions in Jewish Law, however, imply a completely different function of Havdala.

**Havdala as unification**

The Rambam says that a person may make Havdala up until Tuesday night, long after Shabbos has departed and the mundane week has settled in. A person may also recite Havdala over wine (omitting the spices and fire) *before* the appearance of three stars Saturday night, while it is still Shabbos. If Havdala is all about separating Shabbos from the rest of the week, how are either of these things permissible?

The answer is found in words of the Ramban. The Mitzvah to remember the Shabbos and sanctify it is actually two different obligations:

- **Remember It:** This is an obligation every day of the week. Every day we remember the gift of Shabbos.
- **Sanctify It:** On Shabbos itself. In other words when we enter the Shabbos, we sanctify it by making Kiddush; then when we leave the Shabbos, we sanctify it *even more*, showing how powerful Shabbos really is, that Shabbos has the ability to permeate the entire week.

Therefore, Havdala is not a tool of separation, but of *unification*. Havdala is the bridge, the interface, between Shabbos and the rest of the week. Havdala provides the connection that allows Shabbos to channel its holiness and blessings into the weekdays that follow it.<sup>[2]</sup>

Let's explore this concept more deeply in each of the facets of the Havdala ceremony: wine, spices, and fire.

## **Wine: Preserving the Joy of Shabbos**

The *Sefer haChinuch* states that we perform the mitzvah of Havdala with wine because wine brings a person to a state of joy. The Arizal teaches that each facet of Havdala corresponds to one of the Four Worlds, and that by making each of the four blessings of Havdala, we bring holiness into all the Worlds, including our own World of Action. We therefore begin with a blessing over wine to create a foundation of joy and sweetness for the week ahead.

## **Spices: Coming Down Gently**

Havdala only includes the blessing on spices when it is recited after a “normal” Shabbos, meaning that the Shabbos does not lead directly into a Yom Tov. Havdala after a Yom Tov *never* includes spices. Why?

1. On Shabbos, every Jew acquires an extra soul. When Shabbos departs, so does this additional measure of spirituality. Rambam teaches that the pleasing fragrance of the Havdala spices soothes our consciousness as it is thrust back into its weekday state.
2. The purifying fires of *Gehennom*, Purgatory, are not stoked during Shabbos; all souls being cleansed there ascend on high to celebrate Shabbos in Paradise. After Shabbos, any souls that have not yet completed their purification return to *Gehennom*, where the fires are being re-lit. To remove that odor, we smell the fragrant spices of Havdala.

The Rebbe teaches that these two explanations complement one another: when Shabbos leads into Yom Tov, we lose our extra soul, but the fires of *Gehennom* are not re-lit. When Yom Tov ends, the fires are re-lit, but we do not experience the same loss of soul that we do when Shabbos ends. According to the Zohar, we do have an extra soul during Yom Tov, but it is a lower level of soul than we acquire for Shabbos.

On Saturday night, we are unsettled by the void that this special soul’s departure creates. Since Havdala is about transferring the holiness of Shabbos to the week, we make a blessing on the beautiful scent of the spices in order not to dampen our memory of Shabbos and allow the transition to flow swiftly.

## **Fire: Man’s Partnership with G-d**

The blessing over fire must be recited with a “torch”, a candle, with at least two wicks, which produces a flame consisting of different colors. Why do we say a blessing over fire? And why must the Havdala candle have two wicks?

The Midrash says that Adam and Eve were created Friday morning, sinned on Friday afternoon, and were expelled from the Garden of Eden on Saturday night. G-d originally thought to remove them from the Garden of Eden immediately but did not want to throw them out *erev Shabbos*. He instead waited to banish them until Shabbos departed. With *motzei Shabbos* came mankind’s first encounter with darkness. Adam was frightened, so G-d implanted in his mind the idea to hit two rocks together and create a fire with which to illuminate his newly dark surroundings. This was an *or chadash*, a new light. Until now, the light that Adam and Eve experienced came from G-d alone. It was a light of total peace and tranquility. Saturday night was the first time mankind generated light on its own. It is *this* light, this *or chadash*, and not the G-dly light, on which we make a blessing. Why? Because man created it.

On Saturday night, after having reveled in the G-dly light of Shabbos for 25 hours, we are commanded to create our *own* light. Because in doing so, we bring the G-dly light of Shabbos into our weekday existence – into our business pursuits, our work, our play, our chores, our eating, our sleeping. And this is why the Havdala candle must have two wicks: because both our Divine soul *and* our animal soul must

burn with the Light of G-d. True blessing comes from the merging of the G-dly with the mundane, from making the physical world holy. And this takes action. It takes *friction* – you have to take two stones and bang them together, you have to *work*, to make light. We can make light every day of our lives by going out and doing mitzvahs. And this in turn creates in our lives blessing, tranquility, and true joy.

### **Beyond Havdala – Ultimate Peace**

After making Havdala on Saturday night, we continue from creating light to creating peace by saying a series of passages called *Vayiten L'cha*, which conclude with a declaration that G-d will bless us with peace. We then eat *melava malke*, which is also known as the Meal of Moshiach. The concept of Moshiach is the concept of the Ultimate Peace. Thus, by making Havdala and continuing with *Vayiten L'cha* and *melave malke*, we create a vessel for the pinnacle of all blessings, the true tranquility that we will experience with the coming of Moshiach, may it be speedily in our days.

#### **Footnotes:**

1) Exodus 20:8

2) *Likutei Sichos* Vol. 31 Yisro 2