



Discover the Joy of Shabbos

Explore the deeper meaning of the Zemiros, Tefillos and Hanhagos of Shabbos.



The Lyrical Message of Lecha Dodi

By Rav Paysach Krohn shlita (Shiur E4)

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What comes to your mind when you think of Shabbos? Do you think of the special food? Of the Tefilos? Of resting? How far down the list would we need to go to find you thinking about the Bais HaMikdash?

The author of Lecha Dodi

Rabbi Shlomo Halevy Alkabetz lived for the first 76 years of the 16th Century. Most of his adult life was spent in the holy city of צפת, where he, together with his close circle of Kabbalists, had moved from Turkey. His close circle included the great Rav Yosef Caro, the Alschich, and Rav Moshe Cordevero (his brother-in-law). Rav Alkabetz was a Kabbalist, scholar, and poet and his Lecha Dodi was universally accepted as the poetic welcome to the holy Shabbos.

The themes of Lecha Dodi

It is surprising that the universally accepted פיוט to welcome the Shabbos contains only an introductory message about Shabbos. The first two stanzas announce the themes of Shabbos: First, that Hashem, in His absolute unity, miraculously announced both the שמור and זכור of Shabbos simultaneously. Second, that Shabbos is the source of all blessings. After these opening stanzas, there are six stanzas that focus on the yearning for the restoration of the Mikdash and the resurrection of our downtrodden People destined to rise

up from the dust of their exile to worship there. (In fact, those who recite Lecha Dodi on YomTov only recite those first two stanzas, and not the later six stanzas, in keeping with the joyous YomTov spirit.)

The structure of the פיוט begs us to understand the connection between welcoming the Shabbos and yearning for the Bais HaMikdash. It may not be a connection that everyone makes, but clearly Rav Alkabetz made the connection for us. Let us explore it.

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Yerushalayim and Shabbos

The Gemara¹ teaches that the factor that enabled the destruction of Yerushalayim was our violation of Shabbos. Somehow, without Shabbos there is no Mikdash.

And, conversely, the Midrash² teaches that our redemption will be in the merit of Shabbos. Our observance of two שבתות, says the Gemara,³ would usher in the redemption. With Shabbos, there can be Mikdash.

The parallels between Shabbos and Mikdash

Rav Shimshon Pincus זצ"ל wrote about the connection between Shabbos and Mikdash in his Sefer, שבת מלכתא. Some of the connections that he mentions are:

1. The 39 activities which we refrain from to establish the sanctity of Shabbos are precisely

¹ שבת קיט:

² ויקרא רבה ג: א

³ שבת קיח:





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those that are needed for constructing the Mikdash.

2. The Menorah finds its parallel in our Shabbos candles.
3. Our Challahs echo the **לחם הפנים**. (There are Rebbes who even put out 12 Challahs apart from the required two. The Vilna Gaon even suggested that we divide our two Challahs into 12 parts to commemorate the **לחם הפנים**.) Indeed, the table itself reflects the **שולחן** upon which the **לחם הפנים** were placed.
4. Our distinct Shabbos clothing echoes the **בגדי כהונה**.
5. Shabbos is associated with song, hearkening back to the songs of the **ליים** in the Mikdash.
6. We might even add that the custom to adorn Shabbos with flowers recalls the fragrance of the **קטורה**, which ensured that the **Bais HaMikdash** would have an inspiring aroma.⁴
7. We could also add that the presence of wine brings to mind the libation of wine associated with every Korban.

The list goes on and on.

Back to Lecha Dodi

We are now more keenly aware of the message that Rav Alkabetz is sharing with us. If we want our Shabbos to be elevated to **קדושה** and not remain on the pedestrian level of **חול**, then our thoughts must turn to the Mikdash, which is the source of **קדושה** to elevate the mundane world.

If you read the six stanzas referring to the restoration you will notice a pattern of upward, elevated spirit. Perhaps, like the days of the week, we take another step up and then another until we are ready to turn around and welcome the Shabbos, the bride, with real joy, both in the sanctity of Shabbos and of Mikdash.

Our relationship with Hashem depends on our connection with **קדושה**. That **קדושה** surely includes Shabbos, but it is incomplete without Mikdash.⁵

A story about Lecha Dodi

Rabbi Yakov Feitman recently wrote a wonderful book called *Blueprints*. On page 58 he recounts an incident in which a Nazi **יש"ו** went into a Shul with three grenades, intending to cause as much loss of life as possible. As he slipped into the Shul on Friday night, the community davening turned around for the last stanza of Lecha Dodi, **בואי בשלום**. Assuming that they were all turning to confront the lone attacker, he turned and bolted, dropping his grenades as he ran, causing a small fraction of the damage that he had intended.

Takeaway: I will focus on Shabbos as a catalyst for the redemption and the rebuilding of the Bais HaMikdash.

⁴ The Gemara (**שבת לב**) reports that R' Shimon b. Yochai saw an elderly man bringing **הרסים** home to add fragrance to **שבת**. Perhaps the tradition of bringing flowers into the home is a by-product of those **הרסים**.

⁵ ed note: Both Shabbos and Mikdash are referred to as **הגדול** and **הקדוש**. See the third Brocha of **ברכת המזון** and **רצה** within it.