



THE ALUMNI PERSPECTIVE

by Natan Brownstein



Shabbat T'shuvah will always be a significant *Shabbat* in my life; it was the beginning of a huge undertaking I took on exactly one year ago. We went as a Yeshiva to Efrat for *Shabbat*, the "Rav Binny Shabbaton". Different families hosted us, and we ate dinner together as a Yeshiva, with an *Oneg* on Friday night. That weekend I reached several profound conclusions.

The first was on Friday night, when a couple of us were walking with Rav Binny through the city. He told us that coming up on our right would be the "Friday Night Efrat Teen Scene". Coming from my background, a Friday night teen scene means parties, high school football games, dances, drinking, movies; the night that everyone goes out. However, we saw at least a hundred teenagers dressed in their *shabbat* clothes in the middle of the street; some sitting, some standing. There were older ones who had finished high school, and younger ones who seemed to be towards the end of middle school.

People were laughing, talking, smiling, eating, and all within a *Shabbat* environment. It blew my mind: wouldn't it be great to give that to my kids.

But it was the next day that I decided to do something that would forever change my life. On *Shabbat* morning we all spread out to the different *shuls* in the area. Being a lover of R` Shlomo Carlebach, I ventured over to the Carlebach *shul*. It was a small group of people, but a very lively *davening*! I can say it was one of the best Carlebach *shacharit* services I have ever had. Now I was supposed to go to lunch at a certain time, and I could not decide whether or not to stay for *mussaf*. I finally decided to leave after the *kedushah*.

As I was *davening* the *mussaf amidah*, I came to a line I had read hundreds of times, but this time I saw it differently.

"*Yismechu Bemalchutcha Shomrei Shabbat V'Korei Oneg, Am Mekadeshei Shevij, Kulam Yisb'u Veyitangu Mituvecha*".

"They shall rejoice in your kingship, those who keep the *Shabbat*, and call it a

delight. Those who sanctify the seventh day, all of them will be satisfied, and will be delighted from your goodness.”

I can't say why it hit me; after all, *Hashem* runs the world. But I told myself that I wanted “*Oneg*”. I wanted to be “delighted” from the goodness of *Hashem*. I paused, afraid to go on. Saying that I wanted this was quite a statement. Was I ready to make this statement? Would I follow through? Was I ready to accept this upon myself? Did I know what this “*Oneg*” was? I know that I have felt it on some *Shabbatot*, those which I managed to separate the day completely from the rest of the week. But it was then and there that I wanted that **every** week. That *Hashem* is presenting me with an opportunity to experience delight, enjoyment, *Oneg*. I decided to keep *Shabbat*, and from that day on, every *Shabbat* I feel that *Oneg*. It is singing *Lecha Dodi*, being with friends, being with family, laughing, eating, and experiencing the world that we work in six days a week.

This past Tuesday night, I saw a flyer to learn *Chasidut* with Rabbi Reichman at 10:40 PM. I went and found five kids sitting around cake, preparing for *Shabbat T'shuvah*, and the amazing power of *Oneg*. If this could not have been any more perfect, as soon as the Rabbi finished, two students took out guitars, and for an hour we sang Shlomo songs, dancing, smiling, singing late into the night.

So again we are at *Shabbat T'shuvah*, one of the most important *Shabbatot* of the entire year. Why? Because within this *Shabbat* we have the power to think about who we want to be for the next year. What do we want to experience? What do we want our relationship to be with G-d? With *Torah*? With *Mitzvot*? With ourselves?

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel presents the idea of *Oneg* in his book “The Sabbath”. He explains that we refer to the Sabbath as a delight (*Oneg*) because it is a delight for our soul and our body, as one in the same. Since we refrain from doing so many things on *Shabbat*, one might think that it limits our bodies, causing displeasure. But instead we sanctify the *Shabbat* through wearing our finest clothes, eating the best food, spending time with friends and family, thus delighting our body and soul with the pleasures of the physical world. This delight of the physical world is given to our soul, and for one day the soul is elevated to the pleasure of the world around us.

On *Shabbat* we experience the beauty of G-d's world, the world he created for us to live in. In this atmosphere, a day of rest and delight, it is an ideal time to think about *t'shuvah*. Through *t'shuvah* we return to whom we really are, who we really want to be, who we **would** be without the constrictions and distractions of the world around us. On a day in which we have the ability to be in the physical world, but more in touch with our soul and G-d than the six days of the work week, *t'shuvah* comes easier. We can be more in touch with who we really are, and who we really want to be for the year to come.

Hashem should bless us all, this *Shabbat*, in the closeness to G-d and our innermost selves, to think about who we really want to be for the coming year.

Shabbat Shalom, and Gmar Chatimah Tovah

Natan