

Zemirot of Shabbat: A Thematic Analysis

The *Midrash* relates that when Jews eat and drink at a meal, they should speak words of Torah and say praises to *Hashem*.¹⁷⁴ Our -Shabbat tables of today are enhanced by the singing of *zemirot* – poetic songs – written long ago as an embellishment of the mandatory three meals of Shabbat. These songs are often sung to playful tunes, adding lightheartedness to the meal and enhancing camaraderie among those surrounding the Shabbat table. Yet, as an accomplished scholar once told a young child, “read through the Shabbat *zemirot* and study their meaning, for they are not simple songs.”¹⁷⁵ Many *zemirot* have themes that give hope and strength to Jews by speaking about the greatness of the Jewish people and their relationship with *Hashem*. But perhaps more importantly, the Shabbat *zemirot* function as a way to reinforce and retain many of the *midrashim* and laws that are related to Shabbat. Phrase by phrase, *zemirot* are a composite of elements of Bible, Jewish law and -Talmud and *Midrash*, all surrounding Shabbat law and lore, strung together in poetic form. This essay will seek to separate some strands and identify different halakhic and aggadic themes that run through the *zemirot*.

I. Themes Pertaining to the Greatness of Shabbat Testimony to *Hashem's* Creation

The *Midrash* teaches that one who observes the Shabbat thereby testifies that *Hashem* created the world in six days and rested on the seventh.¹⁷⁶ In the *zemer* of *Menuchah Ve-Simchah*¹⁷⁷ we mention: ^{178 179}

Those who protect it and those who remember it – they bear -witness ⁵ that in six days all was created and still endures ⁶	שומְרָיו וְזוֹכְרָיו הֵמָּה מְעִידִים,
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¹⁷⁴. *Megillah* 12b and *Esther Rabbah* 3:13; cf. *Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah* 8:16.

¹⁷⁵. Full disclosure: The accomplished scholar was my father-in-law, Rabbi Dr. Nachman Cohen, and the young child was my wife.

¹⁷⁶. *Mekhilta, Yitro* 8:

It is written: “Remember the Shabbat to keep it holy” and correspondingly it is written, “You shall not bear [false] witness.” This parallel in the Scripture tells us that anyone who desecrates the Shabbat is thereby testifying before the One who said the world shall be that He did not create the world in six days and did not rest on the seventh. But anyone who observes the Shabbat thereby testifies before the One who said the world shall be that He did create the world in six days and He rested on the seventh.

Shabbat 119b:

Rava said, and some say it was R. Yehoshua ben Levi: Even an individual who prays on the evening of Shabbat should say *Va-Yekhulu*. For R. Hamnuna said: Anyone who prays on the evening of Shabbat and says *Va-Yekhulu*, Scripture considers him as if he is a partner with the Holy One blessed is He in the creation and it states, “*Va-Yekhulu*” (and they – the heaven and earth – were finished). Do not read “-*Va-Yekhulu*,” rather “*Va-Yekhalu*” (and they – *Hashem* and the one praying – finished).

¹⁷⁷. Although we do not know who wrote *Menuchah Ve-Simchah*, the *paitan* used the letters of his name, Moshe, as an acrostic in the *zemer*. Some suggest that he was the same *paitan* who wrote *Kol Mekadesh Shevi'i* (see fn. 29 below). *Menuchah -Ve-Simchah* first appeared in print in 1545.

¹⁷⁸. The Talmud (*Shabbat* 119b) also teaches that that one who recites *Va-Yekhulu* -becomes a partner with *Hashem* in Creation.

¹⁷⁹. The translations used in this essay are based on Artscroll's *Zemiros and Bircas -Hamazon*, 1990, with some adaptations.

	כִּי לְשֵׁשֶׁה כֹּל בְּרוּאִים וְעוֹמְדִים
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Hashem Yearns for Shabbat

In the Shabbat *Shemoneh Esrei* we mention that, “*chemdat yamim oto karata.*” This is based on the *Targum Yerushalmi* which translates “-*va-yekhal Elokim*” as “-*ve-chamid*” (i.e., that God “desired” Shabbat).¹⁸⁰

We reiterate that Shabbat is the day for which *Hashem* yearns in *Menuchah Ve-Simchah* when we say:

The holy day of Shabbat, the day of His desire	שַׁבַּת קֹדֶשׁ יוֹם חֲמִידָתוֹ
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This theme is repeated in *Barukh Kel Elyon*,¹⁸¹ in which it is written:

“The most desirable of days” is what my God and Rock called it	חֲמִידַת הַיָּמִים קָרָאוּ אֱלֹהֵי צוּר
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Shabbat is thus a special gift from *Hashem*. The Talmud records that *Hashem* told Moshe that in His treasury He had the special gift of -Shabbat that He wished to grant the Jewish people.¹⁸² We make reference to this passage when we say in *Yom Shabbat Kodesh Hu*.¹⁸³

[<i>Hashem</i>] called it a gift to Moshe, “It is hidden in My treasury”	קָרָא לְמֹשֶׁה מַתָּנָה בְּבֵית גְּנֻזֵי הִיא טְמוּנָה
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Shabbat Rest Is Demonstrated by the Sambatyon River

In terms of the evidence of Shabbat as a day of rest, the *Midrash* relates (*Bereishit Rabbah* 11) that Turnus Rufus once asked R. Akiva how do you know which day is Shabbat? R. Akiva answered that one of the indications is that the Sambatyon River, which actively sprays stones throughout the week, desists from doing so on Shabbat.¹⁸⁴

In the *zemer Mah Yafit*¹⁸⁵ we make reference to this phenomenon when we say:

Sambatyon [river] which churns every day rests [on Shabbat]	סַמְבַּטְיֹון הַמְתַּגְלָגֵל בְּכָל יוֹם נָח
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And in *Yom Shabbat Kodesh Hu* we refer even more specifically to the *midrash* by saying:

¹⁸⁰. As quoted in Abudirham, *Ma’ariv Shel Shabbat*. See also, Rashi’s *Sefer Ha-Orah* 2:63 and *Siddur Rashi* 477.

¹⁸¹. *Baruch Kel Elyon* was written by R. Baruch bar Shmuel of Mayence who died in 1221.

¹⁸². *Shabbat* 10b:

A *baraita* also taught: “To know that I am *Hashem* who makes you holy” (-*Vayikra* 20:8) – The Holy One blessed is He said to Moshe, “I have a special gift in My treasure house and ‘Shabbat’ is its name and I wish to give it to the Jewish people. Go and let them know.”

¹⁸³. Although we do not know who wrote *Yom Shabbat Kodesh Hu*, the *paitan* used the letters of his name, Yehonatan, as an acrostic in the *zemer*. This *zemer* already appeared in print in 1515.

¹⁸⁴. See also *Sanhedrin* 65b.

¹⁸⁵. *Mah Yafit* was written by Mordechai bar Yitzchak and used the letters of his name as an acrostic in the *zemer*. Some suggest he was Mordechai bar Yitzchak Kimchi, a grandson of Radak. Others suggest he was one of the Tosafists (see for example *Niddah* 36a s.v. *Hilkhetah*).

The River Sambatyon which every day runs hurriedly proves [by its calmness on Shabbat] that it is [the day of] rest – [This is what] you shall answer to a heretic who asks	סַמְבַּטְיוֹן הַנְּהָר שֶׁבָּקַל יוֹם רַץ וְנִמְהָר יֹכִיחַ בּוֹ מְנוּחַ תְּשִׁיב לְמִין אֲשֶׁר שׂוֹאֵל
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Shabbat Observers Are Forgiven for Major Transgressions

The observance of Shabbat as a day of rest is so important that we are taught in the Talmud that whoever keeps the Shabbat with its laws will be forgiven even if he worshipped *avodah zarah*.¹⁸⁶ Thus we recite in *Mah Yafit*:

Whoever observes Shabbat from desecration, his Creator will forgive his sin	כָּל שׁוֹמֵר יוֹם שַׁבָּת מִחֻלּוֹ מְחֻלְלוֹ! מְחַל מַעֲלּוֹ
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Moreover, talmudic Sages teach that should the Jewish people keep two *Shabbatot* they will immediately be redeemed.¹⁸⁷ Similarly in *Mah Yedidut*¹⁸⁸ we say:

And thereby [by observing Shabbat] you will merit redemption	וְתִזְכּוּ לְגְאֻלָּה
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Shabbat Allows Us to Experience the World to Come

Indeed this special day of rest is tantamount to an experience of the World to Come. The Talmud teaches that the contentment of Shabbat (“*menuchat Shabbat*”) reflects one sixtieth of that which will be experienced in World to Come.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, in *Mah Yedidut* we say:

A semblance of the World to Come is the Shabbat day of contentment	מַעֲיַן עוֹלָם הַבָּא יוֹם שַׁבָּת מְנוּחָה
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Those Who Honor Shabbat Are Rewarded

Since Shabbat is a special gift from *Hashem* we are expected to cherish and honor it. In fact, the Talmud teaches that wealthy people merit their riches because they honor the Shabbat.¹⁹⁰ And we allude to this teaching when we say in *Barukh Kel Elyon*:

¹⁸⁶. *Shabbat* 118b:

R. Chiya bar Abba said in the name of R. Yochanan: Whoever observes the Shabbat according to its law, even if he worships idols like they did in the generation of Enosh, he is forgiven and it states, “Praiseworthy is the man who does this...[who protects the Shabbat] from desecrating it (-*mei-challelo*)” (*Yeshayahu* 56:2). Don’t read “*mei-challelo*,” but “*machul lo*” (it is forgiven him).

¹⁸⁷. *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸. Although we do not know who wrote *Mah Yedidut*, the *paitan* used the letters of his name, Menachem, as an acrostic in the *zemer*. Some suggest he was Menachem ben Machir who was known as Menachem Ha-Lo’ez (according to some versions the second to last stanza beginning with “*Hilukhakh*” is supposed to be the last stanza and it begins *HiLukhakh tehei be-nachat Oneg kara la-Shabbat Zo*, which completes the acrostic). This *zemer* first appeared in print in 1545.

¹⁸⁹. *Berakhot* 57b.

¹⁹⁰. *Shabbat* 119a:

Rebbe asked R. Yishmael the son of R. Yosi: The rich...in other lands [outside of Israel] through what [deed] do they merit [their wealth]? He answered: Because they honor the Shabbat.

Within your homes to deposit blessing	אַל תוך בְּתִיכֶם לְהַנִּים בְּרָכָה
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To illustrate the reward for honoring the Shabbat, the Talmud there also relates a story about a fellow called Yosef Mokir Shabbi (Yosef who honored the Shabbat) who had a wealthy non-Jew living in his neighborhood. When the non-Jew was warned by astrologers that all his money would go to Yosef Mokir Shabbi he used all of his assets to purchase a pearl which he put in his hat. One day he was crossing a bridge and it blew off his head and fell into the water. A fish swallowed the pearl. A fisherman caught that fish late on Friday and did not know who would buy it. He was advised to go to Yosef Mokir Shabbi, who eventually bought the fish. When Yosef cut it open, he found the pearl and sold it for a great deal of money.¹⁹¹ In the *zemer* of *Yom Shabbat Kodesh Hu* we refer to this story with the brief statement:

Yosef halved a fish and found a pearl in its flesh	יוסף חָצַה דָּג וּמָצָא מִרְגְּלִית בְּבָשָׂרוֹ
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Hashem Pays Back Those Who Spend Money for Shabbat

As the Talmud concludes the story about Yosef Mokir Shabbi, an old man commented to Yosef, “One who spends for Shabbat, is paid back by -Shabbat.” This notion is also expressed in the Talmud, where R. Yochanan teaches that *Hashem* promises the Jewish people that if they will borrow in order to sanctify the holy days He will pay their debt.¹⁹² We make reference to his teaching in several *zemirot*.

In *Yom Shabbat Kodesh Hu* we say:

And if one borrows [for Shabbat] the Rock will pay his debt	וְאִם לְיָהּ הַצּוּר יִפְרַע אֶת חוּבוֹ
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And the refrain of *Shimru Shabtotai*¹⁹³ is:

Borrow on my account My children, and enjoy My pleasures	וְלוֹו עָלַי בְּנֵי וְעַדְנּוּ מֵעַדְנֵי
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In that song we also say:

Reckon accounts with the master who repays what you ate and more	וְחָשְׁבוּ עִם הַקּוֹנֵה לְשֵׁלֵם אֶכּוֹל וְהוֹתֵר
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This last point follows from the story of Yosef who was rewarded many times the amount of money he advanced to honor Shabbat. Similarly, we find in *Barukh Kel Elyon*:

¹⁹¹. Ibid.

¹⁹². *Beitzah* 15b:

R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Eliezer the son of R. Shimon: The Holy One blessed is He said to the Jewish people, “My sons, borrow on My account and sanctify the holiness of the day [of Shabbat] and trust in Me that I will repay you.”

¹⁹³. Although we do not know who wrote *Shimru Shabtotai*, the *paitan* used the letters of his name, Shlomo, as an acrostic in the *zemer*. Some suggest that he was R. Shlomo ibn Gabirol.

Praiseworthy is everyone who awaits a double reward	וְאִשְׁרֵי כָּל חוֹכֵה לְתִשְׁלוּמֵי כָּפֶל
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The Rewards for Enjoying Shabbat Are Endless

The Talmud also assures that one who delights in the Shabbat will be given an unbounded heritage, as was promised to our forefather Yaakov.¹⁹⁴ We make reference to this promise in *Mah Yedidut* by saying:

Yaakov's heritage shall they inherit an unbounded estate	נְחֻלַת יַעֲקֹב יִרְשׁ בְּלֵי מְצָרִים נְחֻלָּה
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And in *Mah Yafit* we sing:

Without constrictions, inherit a heritage	וּבְלֵי מְצָרִים יִרְשׁ נְחֻלָּה
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This notion of Shabbat being a day of delight (“*oneg*”), during which one should take pleasure in the Shabbat, is also mentioned in *Barukh Kel Elyon* when we sing:

Pleasure and also gladness ²²	עֲנֵג וְגַם שִׂמְחָה
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Shabbat Is a Day for Sleep¹⁹⁵

One of the ways that we enjoy Shabbat is to rest. The Jerusalem Talmud mentions this explicitly¹⁹⁶ and we sing about this in *Mah Yedidut*:

Its sleep is praiseworthy when -sufficient to refresh the soul	וְהַשְׁנָה מְשַׁבַּחַת כְּדַת נְפֹשׁ מְשִׁיבַת
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In his commentary to the *zemirot*, the *Eitz Yosef* quotes the famous acronym that Shabbat stands for *sheinah be-Shabbat ta'anug* – it is an enjoyment to sleep on Shabbat. But he explains that this type of enjoyment is only warranted if the purpose is to refresh one's soul, not just to escape the study of Torah.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴. *Shabbat* 118a.

¹⁹⁵. *Behag* counts being happy on Shabbat as a *mitzvah* in his count of *mitzvot* (47). See also *Sifrei, Bemidbar* 10:10 and *Yerushalmi Megillah* 1:4. For a discussion on whether the concept of *simchah* (gladness or happiness) is appropriate for Shabbat, see *Torah Temimah, Bereishit* 2:3, note 5.

¹⁹⁶. Me'iri, *Shabbat* 118b:
And in the Jerusalem Talmud they said, “How should one enjoy it (the -Shabbat)? The master said ‘with sleep.’”

¹⁹⁷. For a discussion about whether it is preferable to sleep instead of studying Torah on Shabbat see Me'iri to *Shabbat* 118b. See also *Shulchan Arukh, O.C.* 290:1.

Neshamah Yeteirah

On Shabbat we are actually given a special soul, as the Talmud relates to us,¹⁹⁸ and we make reference to this soul in *Yom Zeh Le-Yisrael*¹⁹⁹ when we say:

For suffering people an additional soul	לְנַפְשׁוֹת נְכָאָבוֹת נְשָׁמָה יְתֵירָה
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Shabbat Is Like a Royal Bride

In order to honor Shabbat we are supposed to prepare for Shabbat as one would for a royal wedding. The Shabbat is considered to be a queen – R. Chanina would say, “Let us go out to greet the Shabbat queen,” and R. Yannai would say, “Come O bride.”²⁰⁰ Similarly we say in *Mah Yedidut*:

[How beloved is your -contentment], you the Shabbat queen therefore we run towards you – Come O royal bride	מֵה יְדִידוּת מְנוּחָתְךָ אֶת שַׁבָּת הַמַּלְכָּה בְּכֵן נְרוּץ לְקִרְאתְךָ בּוֹאֵי כָלָה נְסוּכָה
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And in *Mah Yafit* we chant:

And say, “Come O bride”	וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְּאֵי כָלָה
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Angels Escort Us on Friday Night

To assess our preparation, the Talmud relates that two angels, one good and one evil, escort a person home on Friday night. If they find the candles lit, the table set, and the beds made, the good angel says, “May it be His will that the same should be for the next Shabbat,” and in response the evil angel must say, “Amen.” But if the house is not prepared, the evil angel says, “May it be His will that the same should be for the next Shabbat,” and in response the good angel must say, “Amen.”²⁰¹ In *Yom Shabbat Kodesh Hu* we refer to this *midrash* when we say:

And if the table is set according to the law and the angel of God will respond with a blessing, “this shall continue for a long time and His enemies will be like dung!” And the angel of evil will respond “Amen”	וְאִם שִׁלְחַן כֹּדֶת עָרוּךְ וּמִלְאָהּ אֵל יַעֲנֶה בְּרוּךְ זֶה יְהִי זְמַן אֲרוּךְ וְאוֹיְבָיו יְהִיוּ כְדוֹמָן וּמִלְאָהּ רַע יַעֲנֶה אָמֵן
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¹⁹⁸. *Beitzah* 15b:

For R. Shimon ben Lakish said: The Holy One blessed is He placed an -additional soul into a person on Shabbat evening and it is taken from him when Shabbat ends.

¹⁹⁹. In *Yom Zeh Le-Yisrael*, an acrostic in spelling, “*Yitzchak Luria*,” appears. Based on this acrostic many attribute the *zemer* to Arizal, who died in 1572. However it seems that the first part of the *zemer* already appeared in 1534, before the Arizal was born, so at least the first part was written by a different *paitan* named Yitzchak.

²⁰⁰. *Shabbat* 119a (see also *Bava Kamma*, 32b):

R. Chanina wrapped himself and stood towards evening on Friday. He said, “Come and let us go forth to welcome Shabbat the queen.” R. Yannai dressed in his [Shabbat] clothes on Friday and said, “Come, O bride, come, O bride!”

²⁰¹. *Shabbat* 119b.

II. Themes Pertaining to the Laws of Shabbat

The Abundance of Shabbat Laws Are Known Through Oral Tradition

In addition to the various references to the *midrashim* associated with Shabbat we also find many references to the laws of Shabbat throughout the *zemirot*. The *Mishnah* relates that the laws of Shabbat are like mountains hanging by a thread.²⁰² This metaphor reflects the fact that the Written Torah does not mention much about Shabbat, but there are so many intricate laws involved in the observance of Shabbat. In *Kol Mekadesh Shevi'i*²⁰³ we mention:

Remember Moshe's Torah with its <i>mitzvah</i> of Shabbat expounded (<i>gerusah</i>)	זָכְרוּ תוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה בְּמִצְוֹת שַׁבָּת גְּרוּסָה
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Eitz Yosef explains that the word “*gerusah*” refers to the Oral Tradition. We emphasize the Oral Tradition because as the *mishnah* indicates, the Written Torah does not speak much about the details of Shabbat observance, but the Oral Torah has many details. And in *Yom Shabbat Kodesh Hu* we use the actual language of the *mishnah* when we say:

Its laws are like mountains [-hanging] by a thread	תְּלוּיִם הַלְכוּתִיָּה כְּהַרְרִים בְּשַׁעֲרָה
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Shabbat Laws Were Taught at Marah

Some of the laws of Shabbat were already taught to the Jewish people before they came to Mount Sinai. The *Midrash* indicates that some laws were taught when they stopped at Marah.²⁰⁴ We make reference to this, when we say in *Yom Shabbat Kodesh Hu*:

Its laws were commanded with warning at Marah	תְּקוּתִיָּה בְּמַרָּה נִצְטוּ בְּאִזְהָרָה
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Adding to the Shabbat

The Sages expound on the terms “remember” and “safeguard” which are used regarding Shabbat in the two accounts of the Ten Commandments. They explain that one must remember the Shabbat before it arrives and safeguard it after it departs. In other words, we must add to the Shabbat by starting Shabbat early and delaying its -conclusion.²⁰⁵ This notion is similarly expressed in *Kol Mekadesh Shevi'i* when we say:

Seekers of <i>Hashem</i> , the descendants of Avraham, His love, who delay leaving the Shabbat and rush to come in [to it]	דוֹרְשֵׁי ה' זָרַע אֲבִרְהָם אֱהָבוּ, הַמְאַחֲרִים לְצֵאת מִן הַשַּׁבָּת וּמְמַהְרִים לְבֹא
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²⁰². *Chagigah* 1:8:

The laws of Shabbat, Festival offerings, and misappropriation of sanctified property are like mountains suspended by a hair because [regarding these subjects] Scripture is little and the laws are many.

²⁰³. Although we do not know who wrote *Kol Mekadesh Shevi'i*, the *paitan* used the -letters of his name, Moshe, as an acrostic in the *zemer* (in the first stanza – *Mekadesh, Shomer, Harbeh*). Some suggest he was R. Moshe ben Kalonymus. A version of this *zemer* appeared in *Machzor Vitry* (eleventh century).

²⁰⁴. See *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai* 16 and *Midrash Aggadah* (Buber), *Devarim* 5.

²⁰⁵. *Mekhilta, Yitro* 7:

Remember and safeguard [the Shabbat] – remember it from before it and guard it from after it. From here they said we should add from the weekday to the holy [Shabbat].

See also *Yoma* 81b.

Women Are Responsible for Lighting Candles

The *Mishnah* teaches that women are punished during childbirth for failing to uphold the three *mitzvot* of *niddah*, *challah*, and lighting -candles.²⁰⁶ These three *mitzvot* are therefore mentioned in *Yom -Shabbat Kodesh Hu*:

<p>The women will light the candles and they will hold fast to the laws of <i>niddah</i>, and the <i>challah</i> [portion that is sacred] they will burn; the merit of these [acts] will serve to protect on the day of childbirth and if they are careful and do not violate then the delivery will come sooner</p>	<p>נָשִׁים נְרוֹת תְּדַלִּיקָנָה וְחָק נְדוּת תִּחַזְקָנָה וְהַחֲלוּת תִּסְיָקָנָה יִגַּן בְּעֵדן זְכוּתָן יוֹם בָּא עֵת לְדוּתָן וְאִם לֹא עָבְרוּ וְנִזְקְרוּ אֲזִי קְרוּבָה לְדוּתָן</p>
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Shabbat Kiddush

At the start of the first Shabbat meal we make *Kiddush* on wine to -recognize the special sanctity of the day. This *mitzvah* is derived from word *zakhor* – to remember or mention – which is used in -connection with Shabbat. The Sages expounded that one should mention the -Shabbat over wine.²⁰⁷ This exposition is referred to in *Yom Shabbat Kodesh Hu* when we say:

<p>And on wine he should remember it</p>	<p>וְעַל הַיַּיִן זָכְרָהּ</p>
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If one does not have wine, he should make *Kiddush* on the bread.²⁰⁸ This specific halakhic detail is also mentioned in the *zemirot* when we say in *Mah Yafit*:

<p>And he should remember it on wine, but if he has none, over bread he should slice with a generous eye to sanctify [the day]</p>	<p>עַלִּי יַיִן זָכְרָהּ וְאִם אֵין עָלַי לֶחֶם בְּצַע בְּעֵין יָפָה לְקַדְּשׁוּ</p>
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Lechem Mishneh

After *Kiddush*, we recite *Ha-Motzi* over two loaves of bread to remember the miracle of the manna, when *Hashem* doubled the portion on -Friday because the manna did not fall on Shabbat. To this end, the Sages expound the verse, “And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it” (*Bereishit* 2:3) by explaining that “God blessed” the Shabbat with a [double portion of] manna [which fell in advance of Shabbat] and “sanctified it” through not having manna fall on the Shabbat day.²⁰⁹ The *zemer Yom Shabbat Kodesh Hu* utilizes the exact same language used by the Sages:

²⁰⁶. *Shabbat* 2:6.

²⁰⁷. *Pesachim* 106a:

“Remember the day of Shabbat to keep it holy” (*Shemot* 20:7) – remember it over wine when it begins.

²⁰⁸. *Shulchan Arukh*, O.C. 272:9.

²⁰⁹. *Mekhilta*, *Yitro* 7:

“Therefore *Hashem* blessed the day of Shabbat and sanctified it” (*Shemot* 20:10) – He blessed it with the manna and sanctified it with the manna.

Midrash Lekach Tov, *Bereishit* 2:3:

He blessed it and sanctified it with manna	בָּרַכּוּ וְקִדְשׁוּ בְּמַן
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We also make reference to this “double” phenomenon in *Mah Yafit* when we say:

Her portion is twofold	מִנְחָתָהּ אַפְּיִים
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And the law of using two loaves of bread is mentioned in *Yom Zeh Mekhubad*.²¹⁰

A day of rest, the holy Shabbat day Therefore every man should recite <i>Kiddush</i> with his wine he should slice two complete loaves of bread	יוֹם שְׁבִתוֹן יוֹם שַׁבָּת קִדְּשׁ עַל כֵּן כָּל אִישׁ בְּיָוֹנוֹ יְקַדֵּשׁ עַל שְׁתֵּי לֶחֶם יִבְצְעוּ תְּמִימִים
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Similarly in *Menuchah Ve-Simchah* we say:

With double [loaves of] bread and the great <i>Kiddush</i>	בְּמִשְׁנֵה לֶחֶם וְקִדְּוֹשׁ רַבָּה
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The reference to the “great *Kiddush*” alludes to the story in the Talmud (*Pesachim* 106a) when R. Ashi visited Mechoza and was asked to recite the “*Kiddusha rabbah*,” that is the morning *Kiddush*.²¹¹

Three Shabbat Meals

One should eat three meals on Shabbat. The Talmud derives this requirement from the three times that Moshe mentioned the word “-*ha-yom*” – “this day,” when he spoke about the manna not falling on Shabbat.²¹² We make reference to the three Shabbat meals in several -*zemirot*. In *Kol Mekadesh Shevi’i* we say:

We eat three meals on [Shabbat] in order to bless [You]	סוֹעֲדִים בּוֹ לְבָרַךְ שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים
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In *Shabbat Ha-Yom Lashem*²¹³ we mention:

“And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it” (*Bereishit* 2:3). What did Moshe our teacher tell the Jewish people? That *Hashem* blessed and sanctified this day [of Shabbat], since it was in Moshe’s day that He blessed and sanctified the Shabbat. And so said R. Yishmael: He blessed it with the manna – with the double portion – and sanctified it with the manna, as it is written, “And on the seventh day it is Shabbat [and] there will not be [manna] on it” (*Shemot* 16:26).

²¹⁰. Although we do not know who wrote *Yom Zeh Mekhubad*, the *paitan* used the letters of his name, Yisrael, as an acrostic in the *zemer*. Some suggest he was R. Yisrael Ha-Ger (and “HaGer” appears in the final stanza – *Hashamayim, ve-Gam, Re’u*).

²¹¹. *Pesachim* 106a:

R. Ashi came to Mechoza. They said to him, “Let the master recite the great *Kiddush* (*Kiddusha rabbah*) for us.”

²¹². *Shabbat* 117b:

Our Rabbis taught in a *baraita*: How many meals must one eat on Shabbat? Three. R. Chidka said: Four. R. Yochanan said: Both of them expounded the same verse: And Moshe said, “Eat it today; for today is a Shabbat unto the Lord: today you shall not find it in the field” (*Shemot* 16:25). R. Chidka holds: These three “todays” are [referring to the day meals] apart from the evening; whereas the Rabbis hold, [the three mentions of the word “today”] include [that of] the evening.

²¹³. Although we do not know who wrote *Shabbat Ha-Yom Lashem*, the *paitan* used the letters of his name, Shmuel, as an acrostic in the *zemer*.

To make three meals on this day	לַעֲשׂוֹת הַיּוֹם שְׁלֹשׁ סְעוּדוֹת
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And in *Mah Yedidut* when we declare:

To set out various foods and to drink aromatic wine and delicacies on all three occasions (meals)	וְלַעְרוֹךְ כַּמָּה מִיָּבִים שְׁתּוֹת יַיִנוֹת מִבְּשָׂמִים וְתַפְנוּקֵי מַעֲדָנִים. בְּכֹל שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים.
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But in *Mah Yafit* we even refer to the derivation itself when we say:

He who triples his meals on his <i>Shabbatot</i> as the humble man [Moshe] made clear in the Law – mentioning “this day” three times in one verse to allude to all three	סְעוּדוֹתָיו בְּשַׁבְּתוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר שְׁלֹשׁ כְּאִישׁ עָנּוּ בְּדַת פֶּלֶשׁ בְּמִקְרָא חַד הַיּוֹם שְׁלֹשׁ רְמֵז רְמֵז שְׁלֹשָׁתָן
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The Shabbat Meals Protect Us

The Talmud relates that one who fulfills the requirement of eating three meals on Shabbat will be spared from three punishments – the upheaval before the coming of *Mashi’ach*, the judgment of *Gehenom*, and the prophesied war of Gog and Magog.²¹⁴ We remind ourselves of this reward when we mention in *Mah Yafit*:

If he participates in all three [meals], he will be rescued from pains and travails.	אִם שְׁלֹשׁ אֱלֹה יַעֲשֶׂה לֵה מִחֲבָלִים וְגַם צָרִים יִצְלוּ
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And also when we say in *Mah Yedidut*:

All who delight in it... from the birth pangs of <i>Mashi’ach</i> they will be rescued	כָּל הַמִּתְעַנְּגִים בָּהּ [יִזְכּוּ לְרוֹב שְׂמֵחָה] מִחֲבָלֵי מְשִׁיחַ יִצְלוּ לְרוֹחָה
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Wearing Special Clothes on Shabbat

The Talmud teaches us – based on *Yeshayahu* 58:13 – that another way of honoring Shabbat is by wearing special clothes.²¹⁵ Similarly the *Midrash Tanchuma (Bereishit 2)* relates that we are obligated to enjoy the Shabbat with food, drink, and clean clothes.²¹⁶ Thus we say in *Barukh Kel Elyon*:

²¹⁴. *Shabbat* 118a.

²¹⁵. *Shabbat* 113a:

And you shall honor it, by not doing your own ways: “and you shall honor it,” that your Shabbat garments should not be like your weekday garments, and [this interpretation] is as R. Yochanan referred to his garments as “those that honor me.”

²¹⁶. *Midrash Tanchuma, Bereishit 2*:

With tasty foods, with various types of delicacies, with elegant clothes and a family feast	בְּמֵאֲכָלֵי עֲרֻבוֹת בְּמִינֵי מְטַעְמִים בְּמַלְבוּשֵׁי כְבוֹד זָבַח מְשֻׁפָּחָה
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No Fasting or Public *Aveilut* on Shabbat

When it comes to the restrictions of Shabbat, the *zemirot* hint to many of the intricate laws concerning various injunctions. Because Shabbat is supposed to be an enjoyable day the laws of mourning are curtailed on Shabbat and one should not publicly display any signs of *aveilut*.²¹⁷ -Similarly in light of the tone of the day, it is inappropriate to fast on Shabbat except if *Yom Kippur* falls on Shabbat. Both these rules are mentioned in the *zemer* of *Ki Eshmerah Shabbat*.²¹⁸ We say:

therefore to fast on [Shabbat] by order of His understanding Sages is forbidden except for the day when my sin is atoned	עַל כֵּן לְהִתְעַנּוֹת בּוֹ עַל פִּי נְבוּנָיו אֲסוּר לְבַד מִיּוֹם כְּפוּר עוֹנֵי
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And we also say:

Those who mourn – on [Shabbat] they must withdraw	הַמִּתְאַבְּלִים בּוֹ אֲחוּר נְסוּגִים
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One Cannot Make Personal Arrangements or Calculations on Shabbat

In the same *zemer* of *Ki Eshmerah Shabbat* we also speak about other ways that our behavior on Shabbat must be distinct. The Talmud derives from that verse in *Yeshayahu* (58:13) that one should not walk the same way on Shabbat as during the week, nor be involved in one’s personal needs, nor speak about forbidden matters.²¹⁹ For example: the Talmud explains that making calculations for one’s accounts on Shabbat is not allowed.²²⁰ Thus we say in *Ki Eshmerah Shabbat*:

It is forbidden to seek mundane desires or to engage in such pursuits.	אֲסוּר מֵצַא חֶפֶץ עֲשׂוֹת דְּרָכִים, גַּם מִלְדַּבֵּר בּוֹ דְּבָרֵי צְרָכִים,
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And we are obligated to delight in it [the Shabbat] with food, drink, and clean clothes.

²¹⁷. *Mo’ed Katan* 23b–24a.

²¹⁸. *Ki Eshmerah Shabbat* is attributed to Avraham ibn Ezra, who died in 1164, and the letters of Avraham form an acrostic in the *zemer*.

²¹⁹. *Shabbat* 113a–b:

“By not doing your own ways” – that your walking on Shabbat shall not be like your walking on weekdays. “[Nor] from seeking your own affairs” – your -affairs are forbidden, but the affairs of Heaven [religious matters] are permitted. “[Nor] speaking [your own] words” – that your speech [conversation] on the Shabbat should not be like your speech on weekdays. “Speaking” – speech is forbidden, but thought [about mundane matters] is permitted.

²²⁰. *Shabbat* 150a–b:

R. Yehuda said in the name of Shmuel: Calculations that are unimportant and past expenditures may be calculated on the Shabbat. It was likewise taught in a *baraita*: -Calculation of what happened or what will happen one may not calculate [on Shabbat], [but calculations] of unimportance or of past expenditures may be calculated.

Even to converse concerning necessary matters – commercial or political talk	דְּבַרֵי סְחוּרָה אֶף דְּבַרֵי מְלָכִים
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Arrangements for *Mitzvot* Are Permissible

However, the Talmud also teaches that arrangements that are *mitzvah*-related, such as arranging matches for a marriage or arranging a teacher for a child, are allowed.²²¹ As we say in *Mah Yedidut*:

Your personal mundane affairs are forbidden on [Shabbat] and even to calculate accounts. But thoughts are permitted as well as to arrange matches for the maidens or to arrange for a child to be taught a text	חִפְצֵיךָ בּוֹ אֲסוּרִים, וְגַם לְחַשֵּׁב חֲשׂבוֹנוֹת, הַרְהוּרִים מִתְרִים, וּלְשַׂדֵּךְ הַבָּנוֹת, וּתְיַנּוֹק לְלַמְדוֹ סֵפֶר
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Walk Differently on Shabbat

The Talmud teaches that one should not take big steps when one walks on Shabbat as one would during the week.²²² Thus in *Kol Mekadesh Shevi'i* we say:

Who walk during it [Shabbat] with small steps	פּוֹסְעִים בּוֹ פְּסִיעַה קְטַנָּה
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And in *Mah Yedidut* we refer to this halakhic detail when we say:

may your walk be calm	הַלּוֹכֶךָ תִּהְיֶה בְּנִחָת
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In another sense we are also limited in where we can walk on Shabbat. The law of *techum Shabbat* requires us to remain within two thousand *amot* of our residence at the onset of Shabbat.²²³ We make reference to this law in *Mah Yafit* when we say:

Her boundary is two thousand <i>amot</i> in length	הַלִּיקְתָּהּ אֶלְפֵי־אָמָה אֶרְכָּהּ
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²²¹. *Shabbat* 150a:

And a *Tanna* of the school of Menasheh taught: One may make arrangements on Shabbat for the betrothal of young girls and teach a young child text and to teach him a trade.

²²². *Shabbat* 113a–b:

“By not doing your own ways” – that your walking on Shabbat shall not be like your walking on weekdays...what is meant by, “that your walking on Shabbat shall not be like your walking on weekdays”?...as Rebbe asked R. Yishmael the son of R. Yosi: Is it permitted to take great strides on Shabbat?

²²³. *Eruvin*, ch. 4.

III. Why These *Midrashim* and Laws?

In the *she'iltot* of R. Achai Ga'on we find many of the same *midrashim* and laws that we refer to in the *zemirot*.²²⁴ Various scholars have -different -opi-nions about what the *she'iltot* are. According to some opinions the *she'iltot* are collections of *derashot* from leaders of the Babylonian -diaspora in the pre-geonic period that were said in the synagogue on Shabbat to the -general public.²²⁵ According to this approach it seems that these -various laws and *midrashim* were selected to convey to the people an appreciation for the greatness of Shabbat and a review of some of its laws. Over the generations these same laws and *midrashim* were incorporated into our *zemirot* so that they become familiar to us as we review them every Shabbat.

IV. The Importance of Singing *Zemirot*

Thus we find that the *zemirot* are rich with references to various teachings of the Sages regarding the *midrashim* and the laws related to Shabbat. We sing about the greatness of Shabbat as a day of rest and the potential rewards for honoring the Shabbat as well as some of the various laws involved with treating Shabbat differently from the other days of the week. Singing about these themes every week, ensures that we remember these statements from the Sages.

Furthermore, the singing of the *zemirot* during the Shabbat meals may have halakhic significance as well. The *Mishnah* (*Avot* 3:3) teaches that one should always mention words of Torah at a meal. The *Chayei Adam* writes that when one recites a chapter of *Tehillim* he satisfies this edict.²²⁶ What about if one sings the Shabbat *zemirot*? It would seem that by reciting the *zemirot*, which make reference to various *halakhot* and *midrashim*, one would fulfill this requirement.²²⁷ Additionally, Rambam writes that one should mention how Shabbat is a special day.²²⁸ R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik thought that by reciting *zemirot* which speak about the greatness of Shabbat and how the day is unique, one adds a greater fulfillment to this *mitzvah*.²²⁹ So in addition to reminding ourselves of some of the themes and laws of Shabbat, by singing the *zemirot* we may be enhancing our fulfillment of the Shabbat as well.

²²⁴. *She'ilta* 1.

²²⁵. See Introduction 1:1 to *She'iltot De-Rav Achai Ga'on* vol. 1, S. Mirsky, ed. (Jerusalem, 1959), 1–2.

²²⁶. 45:4.

²²⁷. R. Hershel Schachter suggested to me that perhaps the requirement would only be fulfilled if the person understands what he is saying. As opposed to reciting *Tehillim* which are part of the Written Torah, when one mentions parts of the Oral Torah he must understand what he is saying in order for it to have meaning. See *Magen Avraham*, O.C. 50, note 2, regarding the recitation of *Eizehu Mekoman*.

²²⁸. *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* 155.

²²⁹. As related to me by R. Hershel Schachter. See also his *Mi-Peninei Ha-Rav* (Jerusalem, 2005), 412.