Please cite as:
Navon, Mois. 2006. "One Thousand Years of Shabbat." *Chidushei Torah Journal* 7.
https://divreinavon.com/pdf/one_thousand_years_of_shabbat.pdf.

One Thousand Years of Shabbat

By: Mois Navon

R. Katina said, "Six thousand years the world will exist and one [thousand, the seventh], it shall be desolate *(haruv)*, as it is written, 'And the Lord **alone** shall be exalted in that day' (Isa. 2:11).[1] … R. Katina also taught, "Just as the seventh year is one year of release *(mushmetet)* in seven, so too does the world have one thousand years out of seven that are fallow *(mushmat)*, as it is written, 'And the Lord **alone** shall be exalted in that day' (Isa. 2:11); and further it is written, 'A psalm and song for the Shabbat day' (Ps. 92:1) – meaning the day that is altogether Shabbat – and also it is said, 'For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past' (Ps. 90:4)."[2]

Sanhedrin 97a[3]

The redemption of Israel will come about through the mystic force of the letter "Vav" [which has the numerical value of six], namely, in the sixth millennium…. Happy are those who will be left alive at the end of the sixth millennium to enter the Shabbat, which is the seventh millennium; for that is a day set apart for the Holy One on which to effect the union of new souls with old souls in the world.

Zohar, Vayera 119a[4]

Six eons for going in and coming out, for war and peace. The seventh eon is entirely Shabbat and rest for life everlasting.

Pirke DeRebbi Eliezer, Ch. 19[5]

1. Abaye states that the desolation period will be two thousand years – but this does not seem to be normative.
2. See Maharsha (ibid., s.v. *k'shem sh'ha'shviit*) for an explanation of the Shabbat/*shmitta* parallel.
3. Also Rosh HaShana 31a. Similarly Avoda Zara 9a.
4. Also *Zohar,* Shmot 20b.
5. *Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer,* Gerald Friedlander, Sepher-Hermon Press, New York, 1981, p. 141.

There is a clear consensus among these sources that the world is comprised of seven thousand years, the last one thousand being "Shabbat".[6] A difference of opinion arises, however, as to the nature of this Shabbat. The Gemara refers to it as being a period of "desolation" and "fallowness", whereas the Zohar and *Pirke DeRebbi Eliezer* refer to the Shabbat as a time of "union of souls", a time of "rest", a threshold to eternal life. Making matters more complicated is that elsewhere the Zohar (Vayikra 16a) states that the seventh millennium is indeed one of destruction.[7] If so, why then would it have said that one should be happy to enter that time?

Indeed, a number of compelling questions arise from these sources. What is the nature of the Shabbat Millennium? More fundamentally, what is the point of limiting Creation in time? How does the long awaited Messianic era figure into the Shabbat Millennium?

The Nature of the Shabbat Millennium

Rambam – No Shabbat Millennium, No Destruction

According to Rambam, the culmination of history as we know it begins with the Messianic era, which will be a time when the world follows its natural course,[8] the primary change being that "there will be neither war nor famine, neither jealousy nor strife" (Hil. Mel. 12:5). As a result, Israel will be free to devote themselves to fulfilling the Torah, as they will not be subject to the

6. Though not within the scope of this article, mention must be made of numerous methods to reconciling these traditional 7000 years with current scientific calculations which put the history of the universe in the 14 billion year range. One approach is to view the "days" before Adam as containing eons (see *Torah Shleimah*, vol. 1, p.84-88) or that the days are such from God's perspective (see Dr. G. Schroeder, *Genesis and the Big Bang*). Another approach is brought in the book *Otzar Haim* written by a student of Ramban, R. Yithak of Acco, in the **thirteenth century** (see R. A. Kaplan, *Commentary to Sefer Yetzirah*, p.186). Based on the kabbalah, the world is composed of seven cycles of 7000 years, of which some say we are in the last cycle. As such, since we are now in the seventh of the seven thousand periods, Adam was created 42,000 divine years from the start of creation. R. Yitzhak of Acco explained that the years before Adam are divine years for which each day is equivalent to 1000 years – "a thousand years in Your eyes are as but yesterday" (Ps. 90:4). Being that each divine year is composed of 365.25 divine days, this gives 365,250 human years for each divine year. Doing the math – 42,000 x 365,250 – dates our world to 15,340,500,000 years old.
7. See especially *Peirush HaSulam* (ibid.).
8. Rambam, Hil. Mel. 12:1.

dominion of the nations.[9] In his *Treatise on Resurrection*, Rambam explains that following the Messianic period there will be the period of the resurrection during which people will live a very long time, like in the Messianic period, after which they will die.[10] This will be necessary in order for the soul to enter the everlasting blissful existence of the World to Come, which is entirely non-corporeal.

As for the nature of the seventh millennium, Rambam in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (2:29, p.209) states explicitly that the world is not to be laid waste for this time, the Talmudic statement that "one thousand years are of desolation" merely being the lone opinion of one individual.[11] Though he unequivocally rejects the part of R. Katina's statement that the world will lay desolate for one thousand years, he does not however explicitly reject, nor accept, the idea of the seven thousand years in general.[12]

Nevertheless, Rambam (*Guide*, 2:27) does make himself unambiguously clear that, whereas "belief in Creation is a fundamental principle", such cannot be said for the demise of the Universe. He states: "It is not contrary to the tenets of our religion to assume that the Universe will continue to exist forever."[13] Rambam argues that, while all natural creations have a beginning and as such must necessarily have an end, the Creation of the Universe is not such a natural creation. That is, the universe came not into existence as a result of the laws of nature, but rather by divine will; as such, it is only by divine will that it can cease to exist.

On this issue of the ultimate demise of the world, it is Rambam who is the relatively "lone opinion", as will be shown in the following pages. Rashba (Responsa 1:9) addresses Rambam's position explicitly and argues against it for

9. Rambam, Hil. Mel. 12:2,4; Hil. Tesh. 9:2.
10. Rambam, *Treatise on Resurrection*, (excerpted in *With Perfect Faith*, pp. 640,2,4-5).
11. Raavad (on Hil. Tesh. 8:8) notes Rambam's rejection of the millennium of desolation from his statements on the World to Come in Hilchot Teshuva.
12. Kesef Mishna (on Hil. Tesh. 8:8) explains that Rambam does not reject the seven thousand years, nor even the idea of the millennium of desolation. This is difficult in the face of Rambam's explicit statement in *Guide for the Perplexed*; nevertheless, what is worthy of note here is that Kesef Mishna believes that Rambam does accept the seven thousand year concept.
13. Similarly Rashbash (Siman 436) agrees with Rambam that the belief in the demise of the world is not a tenet of faith – nevertheless Rashbash argues that the world will in fact be ultimately destroyed.

a number of reasons. He explains that R. Katina's statement is not an aberrant opinion for it goes completely unchallenged and appears elsewhere (Rosh Hashana 31a) being quoted by other sages. Furthermore, he maintains that according to our observations of the world, we should be inclined to conclude that the world will go on forever; however, being that there is a tradition that such is not the case, our belief is so dictated.

Ramban – Shabbat Millennium, Destruction after Jubilee

Ramban, in his commentary to Genesis (2:3), elaborates on how the essence of each millennium can be seen in that which was created on the particular parallel day of creation.[14] Regarding Shabbat he writes that the Shabbat Millennium is to be the portal to blissful life everlasting, stating, "The seventh day which is the Shabbat alludes to the World to Come, 'which will be wholly a Sabbath and will bring rest for life everlasting' (Tamid 7:4)."

In his *Shaar HaGemul*,[15] Ramban explains that the era of the resurrection will usher in the eternal blissful existence of the "World to Come" in which people will live in their resurrected bodies, suited for the wholly spiritual existence of the World to Come.[16] He writes, "Those resurrected exist forever from the era of the resurrection to the World to Come, which is an eternally long world."[17] Here also, as in his commentary to Genesis, Ramban makes no mention of a period of "desolation", but rather an unfettered transition from the era of resurrection to that of the World to Come.[18]

Ramban explains that "Gan Eden" is that place where souls are rewarded immediately after death, as opposed to the "World to Come" which is that time of eternity after the resurrection.[19] The World to Come, states Ramban,

14. R. Bachye (Gen. 2:3) similarly follows Ramban. Abarbanel (Gen. 2, p. 77) refers to Ramban's historical outline and then provides his own.
15. Ramban, *Shaar HaGemul*, (excerpted in J.D. Bleich, *With Perfect Faith*, p.662).
16. See also J.D. Bleich, *With Perfect Faith*, "Resurrection", Introduction, p.620.
17. See fn. 14.
18. Albo, *Ikkarim*, Book IV, Ch. 35, (excerpted in *With Perfect Faith*, p.683) explains that this opinion, that the resurrected will not die again, finds support in the Gemara (San. 92a) which states that the righteous whom God will resurrect will not return to dust.
19. Ramban, *Shaar HaGemul*, ch. 49, 56, (http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/mahshevt/hagmul/shaar-4.htm). This is in contradistinction to Rambam (Hil. Tesh. 8:8), who explains that the "World to Come" is that purely spiritual world that exists in parallel to our current physical world.

is a "renewed" world.[20] However, he apparently does not mean the world will lie desolate for one thousand years to then be renewed, because he states unambiguously that the sixth millennium will see the advent of the Messiah and the seventh millennium will be the Shabbat of the World to Come wherein the righteous will rejoice in their resurrected bodies.[21]

In his commentary to Leviticus (25:2) that discusses the seven year sabbatical cycle, Ramban quotes R. Avraham Ibn Ezra who states, "The meaning of 'a Shabbat unto the Eternal' is like that of the Shabbat day; the secret of the days of the world is alluded to in this place." Ramban explains that "the secret" to which Ibn Ezra refers concerns the length of the history of creation, a point that Ramban noted in his commentary to Genesis (2:3) and Exodus (21:2).[22]

In his commentary to Genesis, Ramban discussed the idea of seven millennia; in his comments to Exodus he links the seven millennia to the sevenfold seven-year sabbatical cycles, the Jubilee being *"kadosh"*. R. Chavel[23] explains Ramban's hint at "the secret of the days of the world" as being based on the kabbalistic doctrine that views the history of the universe as composed of seven cycles of seven thousand years.[24] The fiftieth thousand years, paralleling the Jubilee, signals the end to all existence.

Ramban himself does not state this explicitly, being very sparing and enigmatic with his words. R. Bachye's expansion on Ramban, however, helps shed the needed light …

20. Ramban, *Shaar HaGemul*, ch. 58, (http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/mahshevt/hagmul/shaar-4.htm).
21. Ramban, *Shaar HaGemul*, ch. 59, (http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/mahshevt/hagmul/shaar-4.htm). Similarly *Torat HaMincha* (Bahalotecha 57), written by a student of Rashba, holds that the seventh millennium is one of "Shabbat and Eternal Life" and the eighth millennium is one in which the delights of the spirit will commence.
22. See R. Chavel (on Ramban, Lev. 25:2) n. 40.
23. See R. Chavel (ibid.) n. 23, wherein quotes *B'maglei Hanigla V'hanistar* (I. Weinstock).
24. R. A. Kaplan, "The Age of the Universe", explains that the idea of the seven times seven thousand years is found in *Sefer Hatemunah* of R. Nehunia ben HaKana (first century) and alluded to in *Sefer Megillat haMegaleh* of Rabbi Avraham bar Chiyya (1125) and the Kuzari (1:67). *Sefer HaHinuch* (Mitzvah 330) makes mention of the Jubilee referring to the history of creation. The idea of Shabbat cycles was rejected by the Ari, who explained that the intent was "spiritual worlds" not "physical worlds."

R. Bachye – Renewal, Shabbat Millennium, Total Destruction after Multiple Jubilees

R. Bachye is known as Ramban's "faithful student"[25] – even though he did not learn directly from him – because much of his commentary on the Torah strongly parallels ideas brought in Ramban's own commentary. Again, by analyzing his words, a deeper understanding of Ramban's thought can be gained.

R. Bachye (Gen. 2:3, p.58) explains along the same lines as Ramban, that the seventh millennium will follow the Messiah and the resurrection, and will be a time of "great eternal delight" for those who merit resurrection. This being the case, he explains, then just as one prepares during the six days of the week for the Shabbat, so too one should prepare during the six thousand years for the seventh.[26] R. Bachye (Duet. 30:15, p. 445), like Ramban,[27] writes that the verse, "And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it" (Gen. 2:3), refers to His blessing the World to Come which begins at the seventh millennium.

He explains (Lev. 25:2) that the seventh millennium is likened to *shmitta* where the land lies fallow, unworked, and this is the beginning of the World to Come that is to follow the resurrection. The term *hariv* is not to be taken, at least according to this school of thought, as "destruction", but rather as "fallow" – implying, as R. Bachye states, a restfulness achieved when one is not busy working the land.

Perhaps this then is a solution to the enigma in our original sources which on the one hand called the seventh millennium "desolation" and on the other hand referred to it as "rest, life everlasting". The desolation – *hariv* – is not one of utter destruction, but rather of inactivity. Indeed R. Bachye (Num. 10:35) makes a clear distinction between desolation *(hariv)* and utter destruction *(tohu vavohu).*

25. See R. Chavel (on R. Bachye, Introduction, p. 7).
26. So too Iyun Yaakov (Rosh Hashana 31a, s.v. *barishon*).
27. See fn. 20.

While R. Bachye explains that the seventh millennium is not one of destruction, he (and apparently Ramban) does in fact believe that the world will ultimately be destroyed. In his comments on the fifty-year Jubilee cycle (Lev. 25:8) he explains that the Jubilee refers mystically to forty-nine thousand years of the existence of the world, the fiftieth signaling a total end, at which point the world reverts back to *tohu vavohu* - primordial chaos (Lev. 25:10).

R. Bachye (Gen. 2:3, p.54), states that following the Shabbat Millennium, the world will be "renewed".[28] He quotes *Pirke DeRebbi Eliezer*[29] which states that the renewal of the world is like a scroll being closed and opened again, and that this process will take only a matter of days (not one thousand years). In his comments to Num. 10:35, R. Bachye clarifies that the renewal is after every seventh millennium within the seven cycles of seven millennia which make up the fifty thousand years. However, following the last Shabbat Millennium (i.e., after 49,000 years) the world is to revert to chaos. At this point the souls all return to their elevated spiritual level *(l'atzilutan)*.[30]

R. Bachye (Num. 10:35, p.59) then introduces a novel concept: that there will actually be a renewal after the 50,000 years, such that there are multiple fifty thousand year cycles. He explains that there are to be eighteen such cycles till the world order is complete.

Rashi, Ramchal, Rama, Abarbanel – Shabbat Millennium, Destruction to Initiate the World to Come

Rashi explains R. Katina's use of the word *"mushmat"* to mean that the world will be destroyed[31] and that the destruction will be for a full one thousand years.[32] The Gemara elsewhere (San. 92a) states that the righteous are to be resurrected at the time of the Messiah, never to return to dust, and while the world will indeed go through a thousand years of destruction as part of its

28. See esp. R. Chavel (on R. Bachye, Gen. 2:3, note, s.v. *tzadik katamar*).
29. Ch. 50, Gerald Friedlander, Sepher-Hermon Press, N.Y, pp. 410-411.
30. See esp. R. Chavel (on R. Bachye, Lev. 25:10, note, s.v. *v'shama teshuvatan*).
31. San. 97a (s.v. *mushmat*).
32. San. 97a (s.v. *had haruv*); also San. 92b (s.v. *v'otan shanim*). Similarly *Shibbolei Leket* (Shabbat, 83) explains the world will be utterly destroyed, the expression "the day which is Shabbat *u'menucha* ***l'hai HaOlamim"*** (as opposed to *l'hayei*) implying a rest for God, not man.

"renewal" to initiate the World to Come, this does not pose a problem for the resurrected who await the renewed world – for "the Lord will make them wings like eagles and they will fly above the water."

Concerning the state of the righteous during this seventh millennium, Rashi (San. 92b, s.v., *yahlifu koah*) interprets the notion of "wings" to mean that the resurrected will "float and fly without pain." Radvaz (Responsa 2:839) explains Rashi, and indeed the Gemara, to be speaking figuratively – "wings" being a metaphor for lightness and ease of movement – meaning that the righteous will enter a purified state of being. Interestingly, both Rashi (San. 92a, s.v. *l'achar sh'yihyu*) and Radvaz explain that while the righteous await the World to Come, "their flesh will remain upon them" – which implies, similar to Ramban's opinion, that the people in the World to Come will have bodies, though they won't eat and drink. Radvaz likens this state to that of the "ministering angels".

Regarding the resurrection, Radvaz quotes his own teachers, as well as the Ritva and his teachers, as being of the opinion that there will be two resurrections. The first resurrection will take place with the coming of the Messiah for the truly righteous, the second resurrection will then occur at the end of the Messianic era just before the seventh millennium, at which time all the world will be judged. Those that survive will then enter the angelic state during the Shabbat Millennium, awaiting the World to Come.

Rif (*Ein Yaakov*, San. 92, s.v. *tzadikim*) understands Rashi's position to be that the righteous will be resurrected in the Messianic era and all others will be resurrected at the initiation of the World to Come (i.e., after the seventh millennium). Alternatively, explains Rif, Rashi's position could be that all will be resurrected at the time of the Messiah, however the non-righteous will live and then die during that time, the righteous never dying. Then following the seventh millennium of destruction there will be a second general resurrection to bring back the non-righteous to take part in the eternal World to Come. The righteous, not having ever died, will await the World to Come in an angelic state, similar to Radvaz's explanation.

Rama's position follows along the same lines as that of Rashi. Rama integrates the statement of the Gemara (San. 92b, San. 97b) that God will "renew" his

world with the words of R. Katina, who states that "the world will be desolate for one thousand years", and concludes that the renewal will take one thousand years during which the righteous will await their reward in a spiritual state.[33]

Ramchal (*Derech Hashem* 1:3:9) explains that after six thousand years of existence the world must be destroyed for one thousand years, and at the same time he states (*Derech Hashem* 4:7:2) that the Shabbat Millennium is a time of *"menucha"* – a term denoting the pleasurable rest of the weekly Shabbat. In his *Maamar HaIkkarim* ("*BaGeula*", p. 397), Ramchal, like Rashi, explains that during the period of destruction, "the righteous who are prepared for eternity [following the resurrection] will be sustained by God like ministering angels." Thus the *"menucha"* is a spiritual one, as they await their eternal reward in the renewed world.

The description given by Rashi, Rama and Ramchal of the righteous awaiting a renewed world in a spiritual state serves as a reconciliation of the two views of the Zohar that the Shabbat Millennium is on the one hand a time during which the world will be destroyed, but on the other hand is a "happy" time of "union of new souls with old souls." That is, the seventh millennium will be witness to the destruction of the physical world as we know it, however the spiritual world will enjoy a pleasantness akin to Shabbat.

Abarbanel (Gen. 2) writes that like the week of Creation, so the world will exist for six thousand years with the seventh millennium being a "break" *(hefsek)* and a "rest" *(shvita)* like Shabbat, *Shmitta*, and *Yovel*. He, like Rashi, et. al., explains that indeed the world will be destroyed in the seventh millennium, however this itself will initiate the spiritual world of eternity (as opposed to it being a waiting period).[34]

Saadia – New World, No Destruction

According to Saadia Gaon[35] the Messianic era will be started by Mashiach ben

33. *Torat Olah*, 2:25, p.45a.
34. Similarly, *Torat Haim* (Avodah Zara 5a) explains that the seventh millennium will initiate the Shabbat perfection of the World to Come. So too Ben Ish Hai in "*Torah Lishma*" (Siman 472).
35. Saadia, *Emunot Ve'deot*, Eighth Treatise, (excerpted in *With Perfect Faith*, p.603).

David, unless we are not meritorious, in which case Mashiach ben David will be preceded by Mashiach ben Yosef who will prepare the way for him. This stage will be immediately followed by an initial resurrection, which will be limited to the righteous who are to enjoy the "Messianic era".[36] Perfection will thus be achieved and the world will continue in this state until its end when the new period of the "World to Come" begins.[37] This new world of everlasting life will commence with a second "general" resurrection not limited to the righteous.[38] Saadia describes this new world as a "second world", a "renewed world"; nevertheless, he apparently does not believe that the world will go through a destructive stage, for he explains "renewal" to imply merely that the new world will be so different that it will be "like" new heavens and earth.[39]

Meiri, Recanati – Metaphorical

Meiri (introduction to Pirke Avot) explains that R. Katina's statement is to be taken allegorically. He holds that the thousand years of "destruction" refers to terrible persecutions and perplexities that will abound in the sixth millennium. Alternatively he brings an opinion that R. Katina's statement is not talking about seven thousand years at all, but rather seven fundamental types of wisdom, the first six being attainable by study alone, the seventh requiring not only study but an ascetic lifestyle as well. In any case, Meiri does not believe the Gemara to be teaching of world destruction, nor Shabbat-like bliss.

Recanati (Lev. 25:8), after citing the idea of the Jubilee cycle (like Ramban and R. Bachye), brings an opinion that explains R. Katina's "thousand years of destruction" in a non-literal manner. He quotes a mystical explanation that when the Messiah comes, the souls of humanity are to have already been purified from taint. In order for this to happen, all the souls of this world must come down to earth, live and die, thereby removing their taint through the process of death. When the Messiah arrives, that spiritual storehouse of souls will then have been emptied of all the souls awaiting purification, in other words the storehouse will be "desolate/*haruv*" of tainted souls, as it were.

36. Saadia, *Emunot Ve'deot*, Seventh Treatise, (excerpted in *With Perfect Faith*, p.626-7, esp. n.31,43).
37. Saadia, *Emunot Ve'deot*, Eighth Treatise, (excerpted in *With Perfect Faith*, p.604, esp. n.8).
38. Saadia, *Emunot Ve'deot*, Seventh Treatise, (excerpted in *With Perfect Faith*, p.628).
39. Saadia, *Emunot Ve'deot*, Eighth Treatise, (s.v. *v'achar sheshamati*).

This, he explains, is the meaning of "one thousand *haruv*," such that there are no tainted souls in the world during the seventh millennium. Accordingly, Recanati summarizes the end of days as follows: the Messiah will come in the sixth millennium following the end of all souls being purified through death, the resurrection will then follow, and then the Shabbat Millennium will commence with only pure souls, and this period will continue until the World to Come.

In summary, all those who accept literally R. Katina's statement agree that the seventh thousand is called "Shabbat". Those who believe that the Shabbat Millennium will be one of destruction view the Shabbat enjoyment to be a purely spiritual one. Ramban and R. Bachye disagree, and interpret the *"hariv"* of the seventh millennium to denote a period of *shmitta*, inactivity – thus understanding the Shabbat enjoyment to include a physical dimension.

Creation is Limited in Time

Regardless of how one explains the nature of the seventh millennium, we have seen that the vast majority of opinions, with few exceptions,[40] concur that the history of this world is limited in time.[41] Either it is limited to six thousand years – the seventh thousand being one of destruction, as held by Rashi, et. al. – or it is limited to forty nine thousand years – the fiftieth thousand being one of destruction, as held by Ramban, et. al., or, according to R. Bachye, who maintained that there are to be eighteen such fifty thousand year cycles – the world is limited to 900,000 years until it will revert to chaos.

40. I was only able to find four dissenters: Rambam, Saadia, Meiri, Recanati. Of them, Rambam is the only one who rejects outright R. Katina's statement as an aberrant opinion, though even he holds that the end of the world is possible if God so wills it. Saadia, though he also appears to concur that the world will not be destroyed, nevertheless does limit the history of this world to a specific (though unspecified) amount of time. And Recanati himself brings the opinion of Ramban and R. Bachye, and as an alternative, offers the idea that "destruction" refers to the souls requiring purification.
41. In addition to all the sources discussed thus far, R. Ibn Ezra (Ber. 8:22) finds support for this notion in the words of God Himself when He states that though He will never bring a flood, the days of the earth are numbered. So too, Radak (ibid.). Others not mentioned who hold the world to be limited to six thousand years: Aruch Hashulchan (Oreh Haim, 426:3), Yeshuot Malko (Helek I, s.v. *kvar hayah*), R. O. MiBartenura (Tamid 7:4), Vilna Gaon (Tamid 7:4), Tifferet Yisrael (Yachin, Tamid 7:4).

The notion that the history of the world is limited in time is of great import for a number of reasons.

Mitigating Suffering

Saadia sees the time limit as imperative in order to mitigate suffering. Throughout human history wherein man struggles to achieve perfection,[42] the Jew, indeed man in general, suffers. It is only reasonable, argues Saadia, that a loving God would limit in time such affliction and provide recompense.[43] The future world, a "renewed" world, will be the venue for such recompense, a world of eternal reward.[44] Though Saadia does not talk in terms of seven thousand years, if we apply his reasoning on limiting the history of the world to R. Katina's time frame, the Shabbat Millennium, like the weekly Shabbat, comes to offer man a much-needed respite from the "daily" striving for achievement.

Achieving Perfection

Ramchal finds the destruction of the world imperative to enable man to reach the perfect enjoyment for which he was created. Due to the spiritual fall of man, he degraded himself as well as creation itself; as such, even upon rectifying himself, both he and creation must be renewed in order to achieve true perfection. Ramchal writes, "Both man and the world were in their present form when they caused evil to increase, and therefore, both must go through a stage of destruction before perfection can attained" (*Derech Hashem* 1:3:9). For Ramchal, the Shabbat Millennium, though one of destruction, provides a necessary mechanism for man to reach his destined perfection.

Similarly R. Yosef Haim, better known as the Ben Ish Hai, wrote in his Responsa *"Torah Lishma"* (Siman 472), that the world as we know it will return to chaos *(tohu v'vohu)* upon reaching the seventh millennium, but this will be in order to elevate the world to a higher existence. He wrote this, based on the Arizal's

42. J.D. Bleich, *With Perfect Faith*, p.637, n.10.
43. Saadia, *Emunot Ve'deot*, Eighth Treatise, (excerpted in *With Perfect Faith*, p. 599); also Ninth Treatise (excerpted in *With Perfect Faith*, p.634).
44. Saadia, *Emunot Ve'deot*, Ninth Treatise, (excerpted in *With Perfect Faith*, p.633).

Etz Haim, as part of a response to the question we posed above, regarding how R. Katina could say that the world would be destroyed yet have the benefits of Shabbat. His answer was that, indeed, the world will be destroyed, yet mankind will nevertheless enjoy the Shabbat-like benefits in a new more spiritual world. This answer is different from that of Ramchal in that, for the Ben Ish Hai, the Shabbat Millennium is part and parcel of the eternal bliss, whereas for Ramchal, it is a spiritual waiting period.

The Creator's Signature

Another reason that the Creator would limit his creation in time is to leave, as it were, His signature upon it. The Midrash (Gen. R. 10:9) calls the Shabbat "God's Signature" *(hotem)* – which Abarbanel (Gen. 2, p. 78) explains to mean that the Shabbat Millennium will be the end of the world, for an end thus dispels the false notion used by atheists that the world always existed.

The argument is made that if the universe had no explicit end, then one could reason that it existed forever; that is, if it will exist forever it might have existed forever. This "static" model of the universe is at odds with Jewish belief for two reasons. First, there is no compelling reason to posit a Creator since the world, as it were, always existed. Second, even if one were to suppose a Creator that came upon an existing world, he could not be a truly Omnipotent Creator. For if the universe already existed in its physical form, then any power-that-be would be limited to only manipulating that which was found toward achieving his goals. As lofty as those goals might be, they would be constrained by the physical world that was extant.[45]

For much of history the argument that the world was created in time was purely a matter of faith. Modern science however, in the form of the Big Bang theory, has provided persuasive evidence toward viewing our universe as having been created in time.[46] The discovery that the universe is expanding outward, as if in the midst of an explosion, resulted in the Big Bang theory. Following this discovery, two models were proposed:[47]

45. R. Soleveitchik, *Reflections of the Rav*, Vol. I, pp. 31-34. R. S. R. Hirsch, Gen. 1:1.
46. R. L. Kelemen, *Permission to Believe*, p.31-42. R. Besdin, *Reflections of the Rav*, Vol. I, p. 38, n.6.
47. Nasa Web Site Explanation: http://map.gsfc.nasa.gov/m_uni/uni_101fate.html

a) Though the universe is currently expanding, gravity will overcome the expansion which will eventuate a "Big Crunch" thus ending the universe.
b) The universe is currently expanding and will continue to do so until it ceases materially to exist. (Current evidence supports this model).

In either case, the observed expansion of the universe has led scientists to posit an explicit end to the universe, which has consequently implied an explicit beginning. That is, upon observing that the universe is expanding as if in the midst of an explosion, scientists deduced that there indeed must have been an initial explosion – a "Big Bang". But it wasn't until they became convinced that this explosion would spell the end of the universe that they could conclude that there was a finite beginning.[48] Thus, it can be said that it was by discovering that the universe appears to have an end, that scientists deduced that there must have been a beginning.

Though the debate within the scientific world still continues as to whether there is a way to explain the universe without resorting to a finite end implying a finite beginning, for our purposes here we see clearly that a defined "end" is the signature of a Creator. Indeed, commenting on the evidence that the world appears to be expanding to its ultimate demise, renowned theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking stated, "Many people do not like the idea that time has a beginning, probably because it smacks of divine intervention."[49]

Thus, it can be said that just as the weekly Shabbat is observed as testimony to the Creator who created the world in six days and rested on the seventh,[50] so too does the Shabbat Millennium stand as testimony to the Creator whose world has a finite beginning and a finite end.

48. Indeed, initially scientists tried to show that the expansion would not end the world since there may be enough matter to reverse the expansion (R. L. Kelemen, *Permission to Believe*, p.39-40). In a recent conversation I had with R. Kelemen he explained that: "Those who would like to argue for the eternity of the universe these days are moving towards something called String Theory, which allows for multiple universes. If there can be an infinite number of universes, then one could argue that our universe is not the result of creation *ex nihilo*; but rather, our universe popped into existence through a worm hole from another universe. There is almost no evidence to support this theory, but it's a theoretical possibility and creates enough wiggle room for atheists to sleep at night."
49. Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, p. 46.
50. Rambam, *Guide for the Perplexed*, 2:31.

Purpose & Urgency

A designed end by definition implies purpose, whereas an open-ended project can be said to imply the opposite, that is, a lack of absolute goals. And even if absolute goals are defined, there is really little to drive achievement of those goals if no time limit has been placed on them. Without a time limit there is a lack of urgency, a lack of importance.

On an individual level, the specter of death impels man to be creative; if he had no time limit, he would have little motivation to be creative, always being able to put off for tomorrow what he might have done today.[51] Perhaps this is one of the reasons why King Solomon stated, "Better is it to visit the house of mourning than the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men, and the living will reflect well upon this" (Eccles. 7:2). That is to say, by witnessing first hand that man is mortal, we are reminded of the bitter reality that the time to achieve our heart's desires is indeed limited, much as we tend to deny it.

On the historical level, God Himself has set a time limit for which He will track His project and insure that His goals are achieved. That is, God has set the upper time limit for man's perfection to be six thousand years. If humanity has not yet perfected itself by then, God will ensure his project's success by dispatching the Messiah. Alternatively, man can himself achieve this perfection and thus bring in Shabbat early, which will be divinely acknowledged with the revelation of the Messiah who will thus inaugurate the Shabbat.

The Talmud discusses these possibilities:

> Rav said: all the predestined dates [for redemption] have passed, and the matter [now] depends only on repentance and good deeds. But Shmuel maintained: It is sufficient for a mourner to keep his period of mourning.
>
> *Sanhedrin 97b*

The Talmud (ibid.) then brings a discussion of these two positions based on a

51. Note that even Adam and Eve were limited in time to perfect themselves, there being only a few hours from the time they were created until Shabbat began.

Tanaitic dispute between R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua. R. Eliezer propounds that the redemption will result as a consequence of Israel's repentance. R. Yehoshua maintains that irrespective of their repentance they will be redeemed. After some debate, R. Yehoshua quotes a passage from Daniel (12:7) which leaves R. Eliezer, as the Talmud records, silent, "thus proving that the Messiah's coming is dependent only upon the utter prostration of Israel, not their repentance."

Nevertheless, Ramban, upon citing this Talmudic discussion, explains that Israel's repentance would hasten the redemption.[52] And indeed the Zohar (Vayera 118a) quotes R. Yose, who explains, "All depends on whether the people will repent of their sins, as appears from the verse, 'I the Lord will hasten in its time' (Is. 60:22), that is, if they will be worthy, 'I will hasten it', and if not, then 'in its time'."

Perhaps then, it can be said that really all agree that repentance can effect redemption, the positions of Shmuel and R. Yehoshua simply representing a more somber opinion of the human condition – that is, though theoretically possible, man will simply not achieve redemption in his own merit. Thus they explain that redemption will only be achieved upon God's directive, man being incapable of "bringing in Shabbat early".

Calculating the End

Since the goal of Creation – reaching the ultimate Shabbat – is dependent on the coming of the Messiah, the issue of when the Messiah will come is one which has occupied the minds and hearts of generations of Jews.[53] As stated, the Messiah is to come either when man has perfected himself or when the time frame for such perfection has reached its end; however, many have not been content with this definition and have sought, through analyzing prophecies and Aggadic statements, to pinpoint his arrival.

So tantalizing is this subject that these calculations have been made in spite of preclusive statements in the Talmud and the Zohar:

52. Ramban, *Book of Redemption* (R. Chavel edition), p. 38-9.
53. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, entry Messiah.

R. Shmuel b. Nachmani in the name of R. Yonatan said: Blasted be the bones of those who calculate the end. For they would say, since the predetermined time has arrived, and yet he has not come, he will never come. But [even so], wait for him, as it is written, 'Though he tarry, wait for him.'

Sanhedrin 97b

R. Zera would implore scholars not to calculate the time of the Messiah, saying, "I beg of you, please do not postpone it, for it as been taught: Three things come unawares – the Messiah, a found object, a scorpion."

Sanhedrin 97a

R. Shimon said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, does not desire that so much should be revealed to the world, but when the days of the Messiah will be near at hand, even children will discover the secrets of wisdom and thereby be able to calculate the millennium."

Zohar, Vayera 118a[54]

Thus the reasons for not calculating the arrival of the Messiah are because: (a) one cannot be certain of the calculation, and a passed date will be discouraging; (b) specific, as opposed to general,[55] anticipation itself causes delay; (c) it is futile, since God is not interested in revealing the date when it remains distant.

These statements notwithstanding, the Gemara (San. 97a) itself provides numerous indications of how to anticipate that one is in the generation, or even in the year, of the Messiah's coming. And R. Zera's rebuke was made to scholars who were in fact engaged in calculating the time of the Messiah. Furthermore, one page after R. Shimon is recorded in the Zohar as stating that God "does not desire so much to be revealed", he himself goes on to make specific calculations (Zohar, Vayera 119a).[56]

54. R. Shimon made this statement to R. Yose and R. Yehuda who are recorded as having made specific calculations (Zohar, Vayera 117a-b).
55. Indeed it is a principle of faith (Rambam's Principle #12, Comm. to Mishna San. 10:1) to believe in the coming of the Messiah and to await his imminent arrival (Hil. Mel. 11:1). Furthermore, Rambam (Hil. Tesh. 3:6) and Ramban (*Book of Redemption* [R. Chavel edition], p. 46) state that one who denies the coming of the Messiah has no portion in the World to Come.
56. R. Shimon is also recorded making detailed pronouncements on the coming of the Messiah in the Zohar (Shmot 7a-9a).

Perhaps most famous among those who placed a date on the redemption is Ramban, who wrote about it both in his commentary on the Torah and in his treatise on the subject, "The Book of Redemption". He did so primarily, as he states, to ascertain the end of the exile whose suffering had become acute, as well as to refute the heretics.[57]

In drawing a parallel between the seven days of creation and the seven thousand years of the world, Ramban (Gen. 2:3) writes:

> On the sixth day in the morning G-d said: "Let the earth bring forth the living creature after its kind, cattle and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after its kind" (Gen. 1:24). … Then man was created in the image of G-d, and this is the time of his dominion, as it is written, "Man goes forth do his work and to his labor until the evening" (Ps. 104:23). All this is an indication of the sixth thousand-year period in the beginning of which the "beasts," symbolizing the kingdoms that knew not the Eternal, will rule, but after a tenth thereof… the redeemer will come…. This is the son of David. This will take place 138 years after the completion of five thousand years [i.e., 1358 C.E.]…

Based on prophetic verses in the book of Daniel, Ramban in "The Book of Redemption"[58] explains that 1358 will be the beginning of the redemption which will conclude in 1405. As is known, these years have come and gone without the anticipated Messianic redemption; evidently due to the faults of the generations.

The Vilna Gaon[59] made a related calculation that does seem to have come to fruition. He explains that the Talmud (San. 38b) elaborates the stages of Adam's creation, wherein it states that in the fifth hour of the sixth day Adam "stood on his feet." This, explains the Vilna Gaon, corresponds to the exact time in the sixth millennium when the Jewish nation will be able to stand on its own feet.

57. Ramban, *Book of Redemption* (R. Chavel edition), p. 45.
58. Ibid., p.277.
59. Quoted in R. B. Bleich, Hamevaser, YU, March 13, 1974.

Rabbi Abraham Yelon, in his *"Geulat Yisrael"*,[60] took the Gaon's statement one step further and made the necessary calculation and prediction: If a twenty-four hour period corresponds to one thousand years, then every hour of a day of creation is equivalent to 41 and 2/3 years. Now given that Adam stood on his feet at the fifth hour of day, that is, after twelve hours of night and five hours following, he thus stood at seventeen hours into the twenty-four hour period. Converting seventeen hours to years by multiplying by the years/hours factor of 41 2/3, we find that the "standing up" occurred 708 years into the sixth millennium. Adding 708 to 5000 (i.e., the beginning of the sixth millennium) we arrive at the Hebrew year of 5708, the year we expect Adam to stand on his feet – the beginning of redemption. The Hebrew year 5708 corresponds to the secular year 1948 which saw, as known to all, the establishment of the State of Israel – the first Jewish sovereignty on its ancient homeland since the Roman exile in 70 C.E.. This would seem to be the "standing up", which means that there is still some way to go until the complete redemption.

Conclusion

Our discussion started by pitting a number of sources against each other in an attempt to understand the nature of a Shabbat Millennium – on the one hand referred to as a time of "rest and enjoyment", on the other hand as a time of "desolation *(hariv/haruv)*". We learned that some commentators (Rashi, et. al.) understood the time to be indeed one of total destruction implying a return to chaos,[61] the "rest and enjoyment" being something entirely spiritual. Others (Ramban, et. al.) held the time to be one of both spiritual and physical enjoyment, the term *hariv* indicating "inactivity" as opposed to "destruction". They too held the world would return to chaos, though after a Jubilee or multiple Jubilee period.

Of course, all of this is conjecture since these matters were left intentionally unclear, the knowledge thereof not serving to deepen one's bond with God, as Rambam (Hil. Mel. 12:2) states:

60. See fn. 58.

61. Radvaz (Responsa 2:839), unlike others here, understands the "destruction" not as a regression to primordial chaos, but rather an end to all life on the planet. This idea is also mentioned by Recanati (Lev. 25:8).

> No one is in the position to know the details of this [coming of the Messiah] and other similar things until they have come to pass. They are not explicitly stated by the Prophets; nor have the Rabbis any tradition with regard to these matters. They are guided solely by what the scriptural texts seem to imply. Hence there is a divergence of opinion on the subject. But be that as it may, neither the exact sequence of those events nor the details thereof constitute religious dogmas. No one should ever occupy himself with the legendary themes or spend much time on midrashic statements bearing on this and like subjects. He should not deem them of prime importance, since they lead neither to the fear of God nor to the love of Him.

That being said, the purpose of "occupying" ourselves in this study has been to focus on that which in fact can lead one to a deeper appreciation of God, His Creation and man's role in it. We have seen that man's years, both as an individual and as a species, are limited. This idea should serve both as an indication of the existence of a Creator as well as an impetus to use one's given time wisely toward fulfilling that for which one was created: the perfection of the world in the name of the Creator – *l'takein olam b'malchut Shadai*. May we thus merit to effect the arrival of the Messiah and enter the Shabbat for which the world was created – as the Shabbat liturgy poetically conveys, *"sof maaseh b'machshava tehilla"*, the final goal [of Shabbat] was the initial thought [of Creation].[62]

Mois Navon designed and developed various security ASICs for NDS as part of the Logic Design Group between the years 1995-2000, and is currently developing image-processing ASICs for Mobileye Vision Technologies to improve automotive safety. He is a member of the *Ptil Tekhelet* Association lecturing extensively on the topic of *tekhelet*. Mois has published articles on Jewish topics in *The Torah u-Madda Journal*, *Jewish Thought*, *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, *Alei Etzion*, and *Chidushei Torah@NDS*, maintains an outreach class on Jewish Thought, and gives talks in parshanut. He can be reached at mois@tekhelet.com.

62. "The purpose of this world is to acquire the World to Come" (Abarbanel, Gen. 2, p.78). "Six thousand years for work on the **soul**" (R. Y. Ashlag, Entrance to the Zohar, ch.4). "[As] true good exists only in God, His wisdom decreed that the nature of this true benefaction be His giving created things the opportunity to attach themselves to Him to the greatest degree possible for them" (Ramchal, *Derech Hashem*, 1:2:1).