

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Vaeschanan

Remembering Shabbos and Guarding Shabbos

שָׁמֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ

Safeguard the Shabbos day to sanctify it, as Hashem, your God, has commanded you (5:12)

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Our Parsha contains a retrospective description of the event of hearing the Aseres HaDibros at Har Sinai. As is well-known, there are certain differences between the Aseres HaDibros as presented in our Parsha and as originally described in Parshas Yisro. Notable among them is the fourth Dibbur which deals with Shabbos. Whereas in Parshas Yisro it says “זָכֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ”¹ our Parsha uses the term “שָׁמֹר – Safeguard.” Regarding this matter, we have a tradition that these two terms were actually said בְּדִיבּוּר אֶחָד – simultaneously;² nevertheless, the Torah “apportions” them between the two presentations. It is worthwhile contemplating whether these two terms of zachor and shamor have specific relevance to the two periods dealt with in Chumash Shemos and Chumash Devarim respectively.

Additionally, our pasuk concludes with the words “כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ – *As Hashem, your God, commanded you.*” To what prior command are these words referring?

Finally, the two presentations of Shabbos within the Aseres Hadibros associate it with two different events. Parshas Yisro relates Shabbos to the creation of the world: “For in six days, Hashem fashioned the heavens and the earth”,³ while our Parsha connects it to leaving Mitzrayim: “Remember that you were slaves in the land of Mitzrayim, and Hashem, your God, took you out from there.”⁴ What is behind these two different attributions?

1 Shemos 20:8.

2 See Berachos 20b.

3 Shemos 20:11.

4 Devarim 5:15.

TWO ELEMENTS WITHIN SHABBOS

The Meshech Chochmah begins by drawing our attention to the Ramban in Parshas Emor,⁵ where he states that although the Torah only specifically forbids thirty-nine categories of melachah – productive labor, there is an overarching mitzvah from the Torah to ensure that Shabbos is not spent in mundane or business pursuits. This is what the Torah commands generally by stating that the seventh day should be “שבתון – a day of rest,” while leaving the details of what constitutes an infraction of this mitzvah to the Chachamim. Hence, the specific prohibition against engaging in commerce is derabbanan, but it is ultimately an application of the Torah mitzvah of “Shabbason.”

To understand the role of the mitzvah of Shabbos within Shabbos, the Meshech Chochmah explains that Shabbos actually has two elements to it:

- ▶ Recognizing that Hashem created the world.
- ▶ Ensuring that the Jewish People do not become enmeshed in the mundane pursuits which occupy them for much of the week.

The first element is reflected in the prohibition against performing one of the thirty-nine productive – i.e. creative – labors. Additionally, the Meshech Chochmah states that this element is also what lies behind the mitzvah to have special meals on Shabbos. The extra expenditure involved in these meals is itself a statement of faith that the One Who created the world will provide for our physical needs.

It is the second element, however, which is responsible for the ban on business activities. Shabbos is a day for spiritual recalibration and rejuvenation and hence cannot be spent on otherwise permitted, mundane activities. It is concerning this aspect of the day that Chazal stated: “לא ניתנו שבתות אלא לעסוק בהן בדברי תורה” – Shabbos were not given except to be involved in words of Torah.”

LIFE IN THE WILDERNESS AND LIFE IN ERETZ YISRAEL

When we reflect on the situation of the Jewish People over the course of their forty years in the midbar, we will recognize that different elements within Shabbos assumed particular relevance, depending on their circumstances at that time.

While in the midbar, the People did not really have physical pursuits in which to engage. Their livelihood was taken care of in the form of the manna, leaving them free to devote themselves exclusively to learning and absorbing Torah. Indeed, it is with regards to this formative time that R’ Shimon bar Yochai states:⁶ “לא ניתנה תורה אלא לאוכלי המן” – The Torah could only have been given to those who ate manna.” In this elevated state, there was little concern that they would become pre-occupied with matters of this world if they were not even occupied with them. Under these circumstances, forbidden activities on Shabbos centered around the melachos themselves, while banning business activities was neither necessary nor relevant.

Once they entered Eretz Yisrael and became involved with matters of livelihood, as well as establishing the infrastructure for their temporal wellbeing and security, the issue of maintaining their spiritual goals and orientation became one of high priority. At this point, the “Shabbason” aspect of Shabbos which requires the day to be cleared from all temporal pursuits assumed central significance within the day.

5 Vayikra 23:24.

6 Mechilta, Introduction to Parshas Beshalach.

ZACHOR AND SHAMOR

This is why the first presentation of the Aseres Hadibros, written in Parshas Yisro, has the term “zachor – remember.” At that time, with the Jewish People beginning their sojourn in the midbar, the aspect of remembering Hashem as Creator of the world was of primary significance within Shabbos. Conversely, in our Parsha, with the people about to enter the land of Israel, the aspect of “Shamor” is the one that is highlighted. The concept of “shemirah” includes the idea of enacting protective measures.⁷ In the context of Shabbos, these measures were the ban on business and other mundane activities, in order to safeguard the day as one of maintaining purposeful perspective. Hence, in discussing this aspect of Shabbos, the pasuk concludes “As Hashem, your God, commanded you,” referring to the mitzvah of “Shabbason.”

Moreover, the difference in focus between the two presentations will also explain why they are associated with different events. The aspect of “zachor” commemorates the creation of the world, hence, in Parshas Yisro, that event is mentioned. In contrast, “shamor” refers to protecting the vision required for the Jewish People to fulfill their destiny as Hashem’s people. Thus, our parsha refers to Hashem taking us out of Mitzrayim as part of its presentation of Shabbos, for it was through that that He elevated us to become His people – and safeguarding the Shabbos is a way toward safeguarding that elevated status!

7 See Yevamos 21a.