

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Vaeschanan

Shabbos and Yetzias Mitzrayim

וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיֹּצִיאֲךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִשָּׁם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֵרַע נְטוּיָה עַל כֵּן צִוָּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת.

And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Hashem, your God, took you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm; therefore, Hashem, your God, has commanded you to make the Shabbos day. (5:15)

Many mefarshim raise the question: In what way is the day of Shabbos a remembrance of our leaving Mitzrayim? As we know, and as the Aseres Hadibros state explicitly in Parshas Yisro,¹ Shabbos commemorates the fact that Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. That is something which preceded all of history, including our redemption from Mitzrayim!

CREATION AND SUPERVISION

The Meshech Chochmah explains. The full meaning of remembering that Hashem created the world is recognizing that He continues to control it and to supervise the actions of those that He created. This is the basis of Torah, reward and punishment, for which reason one who publically and deliberately desecrates Shabbos is considered as one who has abandoned all of Torah.²

However, all of this brings us to a simple question. Given that awareness of Hashem as Creator and Supervisor of the world is of relevance to every human being, why is it that only the Jewish people have been commanded to keep the Shabbos?

EVIDENCE AND EXPERIENCE

The answer, says the Meshech Chochmah, is that since keeping Shabbos represents

1 Shemos 20:11.

2 Chullin 5a.

testimony that Hashem created the world, it was entrusted to the Bnei Yisrael; for *they themselves are the testimony!*

All the miracles which accompanied the Jewish people upon their leaving Mitzrayim – from the ten plagues to the splitting of the Yam Suf to their miraculous sustenance in the wilderness with the manna and water from Miriam’s well, surrounded by the Clouds of Glory – all this provided graphic evidence of Hashem’s mastery of the world, which is in turn testimony to Him as its Creator. Therefore, our pasuk states that we should remember that we were slaves in Mitzrayim and the wondrous way in which Hashem brought us out; for the principles to which this bears testimony are the reason Hashem has commanded us – alone – to keep the Shabbos.

SHABBOS AND YOM TOV

With the above idea in mind, we will appreciate that although both Shabbos and Yom Tov are kept exclusively by the Jewish people, it is not for the same reason. The Yamim Tovim of the Torah commemorate things which relate exclusively to Jewish history, hence, they “naturally” belong exclusively with the Jewish people. Shabbos, on the other hand, relates in principle to all of mankind, yet was given only to the Jewish people. This is the intent of the statement of Chazal that Hashem said to Moshe, “I have a good gift in My treasure house, it is called Shabbos.”³ The selection of the Jewish people alone to be the recipients a gift which could have been given to other nations as well gives it the designation of a “good gift” to them.

This basic difference between Shabbos and Yom Tov expresses itself in a number of ways, for since Yom Tov is based on the experiences and relationship between the Jewish people and Hashem, their mark can be found in those days in a way which is inappropriate for Shabbos. Thus, for example, the very designation of the seventh day of the week as Shabbos both precedes and exists independently of the Jewish people, while the designation of which day is Yom Tov, through determining which day the new month begins, is in the domain of the Beis Din. Likewise, although all melachah (creative labor) is forbidden on Shabbos, those melachos which are required for food – and by extension, to related needs – are permitted on Yom Tov. Since Yom Tov receives its sanctity from Yisrael who have themselves been sanctified by Hashem, their basic food requirements also supersede the sanctity of the day. This is not so with regards to Shabbos, which has been sanctified directly by Hashem.

NON-JEWS AND MELACHAH

With this in mind, the Meshech Chochmah presents a fascinating answer to a question that may be raised on a statement of Tosafos. The halachah states that if a Jew passes away on Shabbos, he cannot be buried on that day, even by a non-Jew, as this involves melachos which are forbidden on Shabbos. Tosafos⁴ explain that even though, as rule, a non-Jew may perform melachah for a Jew if it is for purposes of a mitzvah, nevertheless, when it comes to the question of burial, we are sensitive to another concern – respect for the deceased, and it is degrading for someone to be buried through the violation of Shabbos, even if done by a non-Jew.

3 Beitzah 16a.

4 Bava Kama 80b s.v. *omer*.

Asks the Meshech Chochmah: If a person passes away on Yom Tov, the halachah states that he needs to be buried that day by a non-Jew.⁵ Why, in that case, are we not concerned for the degradation that comes with being buried through the violation of Yom Tov, exactly as Tosafos told us we are concerned regarding Shabbos?

The answer lies in the fact that the central idea of Shabbos, i.e. recognizing Hashem as Creator and Controller of the world, relates in principle to all nations of the world, as we have discussed. Therefore, even though it has been “gifted” to the Jewish people, and a non-Jew has no personal obligation whatsoever to refrain from melachah, it nevertheless remains a degradation for a person to be buried through melachah performed by anyone on that day, even a non-Jew. The ideas of the Yamim Tovim, on the other hand, have no relevance whatsoever for a non-Jew nation, even in principle. Accordingly, if a non-Jew performs melachah as part of the burial, there has been no infraction of Yom Tov *on any level* and hence, there is no element of degradation at all for the Jew over having been buried through melachah on Yom Tov.

5 Beitzah 6a.