

DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

Parshas Ki Sisa

Making Shabbos

BACKGROUND: HOW MANY SHABBOSES ARE THERE?

A number of verses in our parsha are devoted to the topic of Shabbos. The Torah introduces this section with the command:

אַךְ אֵת שַׁבְּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ כִּי אוֹת הוּא בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם לְדַרְתֵּיכֶם לְדַעַת כִּי אֲנִי ה' מְקַדְּשְׁכֶם

However, you shall observe My Sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I am Hashem Who makes you holy.¹

The reference to Shabbos here in the plural form — “my Sabbaths” — is somewhat perplexing, after all, how many Shabboses are there? Of course, it is possible to explain simply that the verse uses the plural form since there are numerous Shabboses in the year. However, in every other verse the singular, Shabbos, is used, and we understand it to refer to the day of Shabbos on a weekly basis. What is behind the use of the plural form here?

A most beautiful explanation of this verse is found in the commentary *Haksav V'Hakabalah* by R' Yaakov Zvi Mecklenberg. He explains that the verse uses the plural because there are *two aspects to every Shabbos*, deriving from the two meanings of the word שבת itself.

- ▷ The first aspect is the prohibition against performing any of the thirty-nine types of productive labor (*melachah*). This is the basis of Shabbos observance, and, as we know, the prohibition against performing *melachah* is among the most severe in the Torah. Regarding this aspect, the word Shabbos derives from the word לשבות – to rest.
- ▷ However, refraining from *melachah* does not constitute a full observance of Shabbos. Having cleared the day from prohibited labors, the question then becomes: what does one fill it with? This brings us to the second aspect of Shabbos, to actively use the day to restore a sense of vision and purpose in one’s life that may have become blurred or faded in the day-to-day involvements of the week. This aspect of Shabbos is related to the word לשבת – to settle, and refers to the consolidating of our spiritual values and perspective.

It is these two aspects which constitute a full observance of the Shabbos, and thus the verse states

¹ *Shemos* 31:13.

“keep my Shabboses,” meaning, keep both aspects of the Shabbos. In this vein, the verse proceeds to explain the full nature and goal of Shabbos: “For it is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I am Hashem Who makes you holy.” The ultimate goal of Shabbos is stated here as acting not only as a commemoration of the creation, but also as a sign of the bond between Hashem and us, and the sanctity that He bestows upon us. To achieve this goal we need to keep “two Shabboses” — every week!

With this in mind, Rav Mecklenberg explains the well-known statement in the Gemara:²

אלמלי שמרו ישראל שתי שבתות היו נגאלים

If the Jewish people only kept two Shabboses, they would be redeemed.

The classic question raised by the commentators is: Why two? What is it about the second Shabbos that does not exist in the first? Why is one Shabbos not good enough?

Based on the above idea, the Ksav V’Hakabalah explains that “two Shabboses” do not refer to two consecutive Shabboses, but rather to both aspects of the Shabbos as we have identified them. If the Jewish people would use Shabbos not only as a day of rest from physical labor, but also as a day of spiritual content and restored perspective, they would indeed be well on the way to redemption.

WHEN WAS CREATION COMPLETED?

In fact, this fundamental idea that ceasing physical labor is in order to make room for a spiritual element may actually be observed within the original Shabbos itself. The verse states that “God completed His work on the seventh day, and He rested on the seventh day from the work that He created.”³ These two statements seemingly contradict each other. If Hashem rested on the seventh day from creating, then He must have finished creating on the sixth day! Why does the verse begin by saying that He completed creation on the seventh day?

The Alshich⁴ explains that physical creation ceased on the sixth day. However, the final element of creation was the Shabbos itself, which is a day of spirituality. The introduction of this type of creation on the seventh day was made possible by ceasing all physical creation by the end of the sixth day. This then becomes the goal of every subsequent Shabbos: to use the space left by the cessation of physical labor to allow for the entry of spiritual pursuits.

This awareness of the ultimate goal of Shabbos will allow us to appreciate many of the enactments of the Rabbis regarding Shabbos. The Torah forbids engaging in melachah. The Rabbis further banned even handling objects which are normally used for melachah. Indeed, as early as the prophet Isaiah, even talking about business pursuits was banned on Shabbos.⁵ The goal of these enactments is clear: don’t just refrain from performing melachah on Shabbos — get it out of your system! Clear the day for what Shabbos is meant to be used for.

In the same vein, the Rabbis instituted special Shabbos meals, lighting Shabbos candles, special prayers and Torah reading, encouraging us to use the day for what it was meant to be used for — restoring perspective and consolidating our spiritual goals.

2 *Shabbos* 118b.

3 Bereishis 2:2.

4 Commentary to Bereishis, *ibid.*

5 See Yeshayah 58:13, and *Shabbos* 113b.

FOR WHOM THE SHABBOS?

Moreover, this second aspect of keeping Shabbos will explain why even though the Torah expects all the nations of the world to believe in Hashem as Creator, nevertheless, Shabbos was given only to the Jewish people. Why is this so?

Once we appreciate the full significance of keeping Shabbos, we understand that only the nation which Hashem chose to sanctify by giving them the Torah are entrusted with a day of bringing spirituality into the world.

In this regard, we say that Shabbos is not only *זכרון למעשה בראשית* – a commemoration of the creation of the world, but also *זכר ליציאת מצרים* – a commemoration of leaving Egypt. Now, we can understand how the festivals commemorate the Exodus from Egypt, but how is this true concerning Shabbos?

The point in history when Hashem chose us to sanctify as His nation is when He took us out of Egypt. When we consider the full meaning the fact that only the Jewish people were entrusted with the mitzvah of Shabbos, it will bring us back to the Exodus when we were first elevated to the status which allows us to connect with the full observance of this day.

This is also the idea, mentioned in our parsha of *לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת* – to make the Shabbos.⁶ Upon being presented with a physical vacuum on Shabbos, we then proceed to make it — by filling it with spiritual content.

As we will appreciate, this does not mean to negate or disregard the aspect of physical rest on Shabbos. The physical cessation from the labors and stresses of the week is an equal part of the mitzvah, and is often a much-needed break. However, the call of the Torah to keep “my Shabboses” is to see to it that the day also serves as one of spiritual re-alignment, reclaiming the perspective we may have lost during the past week.

RESTORING VISION

The Gemara⁷ states that taking oversized strides can diminish a person's eyesight. However, it adds that this can be restored by making Kiddush on Friday night. The Maharal⁸ explains that the number five hundred represents the world, as the Gemara elsewhere refers to the world as being “five hundred parsangs by five hundred parsangs.” Every person needs to walk through the world in the sense that he needs to be involved in the affairs of the world. It may happen, however, that over the course of the week, a person takes oversized strides through the world. This refers to over-investing in ascribing outsized significance to matters of this world, seeing them as an end unto themselves, instead of a means toward the higher goal of successful Torah living. Such a person has lost “one out of five hundred” of his vision, i.e., he has lost a measure of clarity regarding his view of the world.

Can a person ever retrieve this vision? The answer, says the Gemara, is yes, at Kiddush on Friday night. By embracing the sanctity of the Shabbos, and by hearing its message reminding him of a higher destiny, a person can restore his perspective on the physical world.

6 Verse 16.

7 *Shabbos* 113b.

8 *Chiddushei Aggados Shabbos* ibid.

THE END — AND BEGINNING — OF THE WEEK

Based on our discussion, we understand that the perspective and sense of purpose which one attains on Shabbos should make a difference to the days ahead. In this regard, we can say that Shabbos is not only the light at the end of the tunnel for the week that has just passed, but also a lighthouse to illuminate the week to come. The way we go about our weekly affairs should be guided by the restored consciousness of our values which took place over Shabbos. A successful Shabbos should lead to a Shabbos-impacted week.

The Gemara⁹ states:

כל המענג את השבת נותנים לו כל משאלות לבו

Anyone who delights in the Shabbos, they give him all of his heart's desires.

We may ask: Many people have kept Shabbos faithfully, yet we do not necessarily see that all their hearts desires came true!

The *Shem MiShmuel* explains that the Gemara does not say that one who keeps the Shabbos properly will have all his hearts desires fulfilled. Rather, it says “they give him all of his heart’s desires.” The things a person desires during the week may be very limited in scope, in keeping with the nature of weekday involvements — perhaps he wishes for a bonus or a promotion or a new car. One who succeeds in tapping into the essence of Shabbos and delights in it will leave having received new things to wish for. Now, he may wish for greater insight in Torah, greater patience and understanding in dealing with people, greater connection to Hashem during prayer, and all the many other things which the Shabbos allowed him to remember. These are the wishes which are given to him when he delights in the Shabbos.

This is the gift of Shabbos!

⁹ *Shabbos* 118b.