

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Va'etchanan
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Va'etchanan – the secret of Shabbat¹

In this week's Parasha of Va'etchanan, Moshe repeats the Aseret Hadibrot (10 Commandments) for Bnei Yisrael. The Aseret Hadibrot were already included in Parashat Yitro, when the Torah recounted the events that took place at Har Sinai. However, there are a number of slight differences between the two versions of the Aseret Hadibrot. The commentators discuss the significance of these differences. One such difference is in the 4th Commandment, the mitzvah of keeping Shabbat:

Parashat Yitro

“Zachor (Remember) the day of Shabbat to sanctify it” (Shmot 20:8)

Parashat Va'etchanan

“Shamor (Guard) the day of Shabbat to sanctify it...” (Devarim 5:12)

Rashi explains that Hashem said the words, “zachor” and “shamor” in the same utterance and as a single word.² This is obviously impossible for human beings to do, or perhaps even to imagine. We mention this idea in the first verse of Lecha Dodi during Kabbalat Shabbat: *“Shamor v'zachor b'dibbur echad”* (“Guard and Remember in a single utterance”).³ “Shamor” refers to the negative mitzvot of Shabbat – the 39 categories of melacha (labour) that are forbidden on Shabbat. “Zachor” refers to the positive mitzvot of Shabbat – the obligation to recite Kiddush and to have oneg (pleasure) on Shabbat. Included in the obligation to have oneg is the requirement to light Shabbat candles. The fact that these two words were said in one utterance alludes to the fact that these two aspects of Shabbat are bound together and both are necessary to properly fulfil the commandment of Shabbat.

Incidentally, this is one of the explanations as to why women also have a Torah obligation to hear Kiddush. Generally, women are exempt from Torah based, time-bound, positive obligations (such as sitting in a sukkah, lulav and etrog etc.).⁴ However, Shabbat is an exception. Since “shamor” and “zachor” were said in one utterance, the commentators learn that whoever is obligated to keep the negative mitzvot of Shabbat is also obligated to keep the positive mitzvot of Shabbat.

Rabbi Zalman Labinsky explains the deeper meaning behind Shabbat and the twin obligations of “shamor” and “zachor”. Shabbat is referred to as a taste of the World to Come⁵. One day each week

¹ This week's Darchai Noam is inspired by a series of shiurim about the deeper meaning behind Shabbat by Rabbi Zalman Labinsky - “Growing Through Shabbos” (<http://becomingdivine.com/shabbos/>)

² Rashi to Devarim 5:12.

³ See page 316 of the standard Artscroll Ashkenaz siddur.

⁴ This is not necessarily the case with *Rabbinical* time-bound, positive mitzvot such as listening to Megillat Esther on Purim and lighting Chanukah candles. This is because the Rabbis have the authority to decree that women are obligated in Rabbinical mitzvot. Another explanation is that there is a Torah mitzvah to not disobey the Rabbis (Devarim 17:10) so when women listen to the Megillah or light Chanukah candles they are actually fulfilling a negative Torah mitzvah as well as a positive, time-bound Rabbinical mitzvah (heard from Rabbi Benzion Milecki). Note that women can still *choose* to fulfill Torah based, time-bound, positive obligations and Ashkenazi women can even recite a bracha on the performance of such mitzvot.

⁵ “Me'ein Olam Haba” – see the opening line of the 6th verse of “Mah Yedidot” (the popular zemirah sung on Friday night).

we are gifted by Hashem with the amazing opportunity to take a break from this world and experience the World to Come. This helps us to focus on the ultimate end goal of life. Shabbat provides us with a weekly opportunity to escape the daily grind of this physical world and to remind us of the true reason that we are here. If not for that reminder we could quite easily spend our entire life focusing on material pursuits and forgetting about the eternal world of truth.

Rabbi Labinsky explains this with the help of a metaphor. Imagine going on a luxury cruise. The ship is attached to a pier with 39 ropes. In order to leave the harbour and commence the cruise all the ropes need to be released. If any of the ropes remain attached to the pier, the ship cannot sail. The 39 ropes represent the 39 creative labours that are forbidden for us to do on Shabbat. The essence of this world is creativity, the point being that we perfect this world through our creative work and thus emulate Hashem. However, when we cease to exist in this world, we will be in the World to Come – a world that is not about ‘doing’, ‘creating’ or ‘building’, but rather just ‘being’ and ‘existing’. On Shabbat we have to desist from these acts of creativity in order to experience a taste of the World to Come. “Shamor” represents those creative acts from which we must desist.

However, in order to enjoy the cruise it is not sufficient to detach from the pier and merely sit in the harbour! Releasing the 39 ropes is simply a necessary pre-condition for the cruise to take place. Similarly, desisting from the 39 forbidden labours is a necessary pre-condition to experiencing Olam Haba during Shabbat. We also need the “zachor”, which represents the positive aspects of Shabbat, in order to receive a real taste of Olam Haba. We need to make Kiddush and spend time enjoying the delights (physical and spiritual) of Shabbat.

The Rabbis have added many fences around the restrictions of the Torah. Rabbinic laws have been enacted which forbid many acts that would otherwise be permitted according to Torah law. Why? Most of us are very tightly bound up in the physical world. To successfully detach ourselves from this world takes a lot of effort. It is very easy to slip back into Olam Hazei. Thus, the Rabbis instigated additional decrees in order to protect us from slipping in this manner. Let’s go back to our example of the cruise ship. Imagine that we are on a cruise to an exotic location but we took along our smart-phone and lap-top to monitor emails and stay on top of our work. We would end up spending a lot of our time working, or thinking about work. Though we may have physically embarked on the cruise, mentally and emotionally we are still at work. It’s not a real holiday!

The same applies to our weekly Shabbat experience. For example, technically according to the Torah law there is nothing wrong with reading a newspaper on Shabbat. We are not breaking any of the 39 forbidden labours by doing so. However, if we turned to the finance section and started to check our share portfolio⁶ or read articles about economics and the future of interest rates or property prices, we risk being very quickly drawn back into the physical world. The Rabbis prohibit such activities so as to enhance our Shabbat experience and protect us from slipping inadvertently back into Olam Hazei. They understand human nature and temptations and they want to protect us from ourselves. This maximises our chances of experiencing Shabbat as it was meant to be, as a true reflection of Olam Haba. To miss out on such a wonderful experience would be a real pity!

Let’s try something this week:

1. Spend some time learning the laws of Shabbat so that we can try to keep it properly.
2. Remember that Shabbat is a taste of the World to Come. Only by embracing all the laws – both shamor and zachor – will we be able to experience the true experience of the World to Come and then allow that experience to flow into the rest of the week.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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⁶ For our US readers, that means “stock portfolio”.