

PARASHAT HASHAVUA

PARASHAT EMOR

Sanctified Time

Rav Yonatan Grossman

In this week's parasha, immediately after the section about the different festivals, we read two commands that return us to the themes that permeate the end of Sefer Shemot - the building of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and the service done within it. First is the command to light the Eternal Light (Ner Tamid) on the menorah, followed by the command about the twelve loaves (Lechem Ha-panim) that are to be placed on the shulchan.

The position of these commands is surprising. Why did the Torah choose to return to the command to light the Menora, which already appears in parashat Tetzaveh; and why now, after dealing with the sacrifices, tum'a (impurity), the status of the priests, and the holidays, does the Torah remember to command us about the twelve loaves, an activity that is associated with the daily activities that are ongoing in the Mishkan.

Different commentaries address this surprising positioning. There are those who note their surprise upon reading these commands here (see Rashi and Rashbam), and there are those who offer a specific solution. Thus, for example, the Ramban, after asking why the text specifies the actions to be done with the Menora and the Table a second time, writes:

The need for this parsha is two-fold: There (in parashat Tetzaveh) it is written: "You shall further instruct the Israelites to bring you clear oil of beaten olives," meaning from every man who possesses clear oil of beaten olives, along with the rest of the tithes of the

Mishkan and so they did. Now once this oil that the princes brought as a donation was used up, it was commanded that Benei Yisrael take pure olive oil from the community for future generations.

The Ramban, although he explains what is added here to what was written in Shemot, does not explain why it is written specifically here, isolated from the description of the Menora itself and from the commands associated with the Menora (the Ramban does hint at a possible solution when he says - "And now the oil was finished," meaning only now did the question of obtaining oil resurface.)

I would like to suggest an alternative answer to the problematic placement of these commands, and to see them as a direct continuation of the chapter on the holidays that comes before them. For this purpose, we must first examine the chapter on the holidays.

The Torah lists all of the holidays again in parashat Pinchas (in Bamidbar). The Sages dealt with this repetition and said: "In Torat Kohanim (Vayikra) they appear to teach us of their order in the year; in Chumash Ha-pekudim (Bamidbar), they appear to teach us of their respective sacrifices" (Sifri, Devarim 127). In other words, our parasha lists the holidays in order to establish their date, whereas in Pinchas the Torah concentrates on the additional sacrifices that must be brought during each holiday.

With regard to Pinchas, this explanation appears to fully clarify the nature of the list, where the emphasis is clearly on the sacrifices of each day. However, with regard to our parasha the explanation is not complete. Even though the holidays appear here according to their chronological order in the yearly cycle, we still want to know what the Torah is saying about each

holiday, aside from their respective orders in the list. What is the content that defines these holidays that all of Israel must celebrate?

The answer is simple, and is fully expressed in the introduction to our parasha: "These are the set times of God, the sacred occasions (mikra'ei kodesh), which you shall celebrate each at its appointed time" ([Vayikra 23:4](#)). The Torah is telling what the festivals are called "mikra'ei kodesh," and therefore, FOR THIS REASON, Benei Yisrael must "call them" ("tikra'u otam") at their time - at the time appropriate to them. And indeed, this emphasis is repeated throughout all of the holidays that are designated in our chapter as mikra'ei kodesh. How are Benei Yisrael meant to react to sacred time? What is the meaning of the instruction to "call this day sacred?"

In explaining this expression, mikra'ei kodesh, the Rishonim differ: the Ramban understands the words to mean "a day when called together for a sacred purpose."

This explanation is based on the text in [Shemot 12:8](#). With regard to the seventh day of Pessach, it is written:

1. "Atzeret to God"
2. "No work at all should be done with them."

If we compare this language to that in our chapter:

1. "You shall celebrate a sacred occasion"
2. "You shall not work at your occupation"

We will arrive at the equation that "Atzeret to God" = "You shall celebrate a sacred occasion." The word "atzeret" seems to mean "an assembly in a central place," and therefore, the Ramban concludes that the expression mikra'ei kodesh also hints at an assembly. (See also Shadal's explanation, which follows along the lines of Ramban).

In contrast, Rashi and Rashbam explain that "mikra'ei kodesh" refers to "calling out" or "announcing." They conclude that one must make a declaration of the sacred day, thereby

sanctify it (compare: "Solemnize a fast, Proclaim an assembly" [Yoel 1:14](#))

It must be emphasized that the Torah immediately associates mikra'ei kodesh with the prohibition of doing work. Almost throughout the entire list we read the standard text: "You shall celebrate a sacred occasion. You shall not work." It appears that refraining from doing work is the actualization of the fact that the day is sacred. According to Rashi, then, the word "mikra'ei" means that the special quality of the day should be proclaimed, not verbally, but by refraining from work. In this way a person calls the day sacred.

In other words, if parashat Pinchas emphasizes the additional sacrifices we need to offer during the holidays, here, in our text, the emphasis is on the actual meaning behind the concept of sanctified time, a sanctification that results in the cessation of daily, regular activity. There are special times that must be given a particular quality, which is accomplished by the cessation of work.

In light of the fact that the Torah is focusing on the mikra'ei kodesh aspect of these days, we must examine both the holidays included in this list and the structure of the chapter.

At the beginning of the list, we find two introductory statements.

God spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: the fixed times of God, which you shall proclaim as sacred occasions, these are my fixed times.

On six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there shall be a Shabbat of complete rest, a sacred occasion. You shall do no work; it shall be a Shabbat of God throughout your settlements.

These are the set times of God, the sacred occasions, which you shall celebrate each at its appointed time: In

the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, there shall be a Passover offering to God ...

There are two headings. The first is followed only by the command about the Shabbat. After the Shabbat, the initial opening is repeated nearly identically, and this serves as the opening title for the entire list of holidays. The result is that the second introduction serves to isolate the Shabbat from the rest of the holidays, creating two sanctified groups of time - Shabbat on one hand and the rest of the holidays on the other hand.

If we carefully examine the verses themselves, we will clearly see a basic difference between Shabbat and the rest of the holidays. There are two different approaches to time in the verses in front of us.

In the heading for the holidays we read: "These are the set times of God, the sacred occasions, which you shall celebrate each at its appointed time," meaning these have to be called "sacred occasions" in their proper times ("be-mo'adam"). And indeed, for every holiday there is a set date when it should be celebrated: "On the fourteenth day of the first month, at twilight ... and on the fifteenth day of that month ... In the seventh month, on the first day of that month ... Mark the tenth day of this seventh month ... etc." At the moment that a specific date arrives on the calendar, one must call it a sacred occasion.

The heading that introduces the command for Shabbat does not include the term "in their time" or "in its time." There is no set time for Shabbat. Shabbat does not take place when we arrive at a certain date. Rather: "On six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there shall be a Shabbat of complete rest, a sacred occasion." Parallel to the dates set in relation to the natural astronomical world, there is a type of counting which does not heed the revolutions of the world and the changes that take place in it. From the days of creation, every seventh day is holy and it does not matter what date the seventh day of the week falls out on.

The Shabbat creates a method of counting that is different than the common dating method, and is built on a consciousness of time that is disconnected from the physical-real world. Specifically through this disconnection, Israel testifies that the world was created by God, since the world cannot be taken for granted and is not self-explanatory. The method of counting which offers an alternative to cosmic reality testifies that that same cosmic reality emanated as something from nothing, it was new and created.

[There is one festival that maintains a close connection with Shabbat, while running parallel to the rest of the festivals, and that is Shavuot. This holiday does not have a specific date, like Shabbat, and it is determined by counting seven weeks from the Omer. It is not coincidental that the text reminds us again and again about Shabbat or words that are reminiscent of Shabbat, while commanding us about Shavuot: "The priest shall elevate it on the day after the Shabbat ... And from the day on which you bring the sheaf of elevation offering - the day after the Shabbat - you shall count off seven weeks. They must be complete: you must count until the day after the seventh week" (ibid. 11-17).

I will just point out now that holidays with a historical character, including those of Tishrei, are associated with their fixed dates within the yearly cycle, while Shabbat and Shavuot, which are associated with nature and creation, fall according to a counting system that pre-dates them. This idea is rather complex, and we will, please God, expand on them at a different opportunity.]

After describing the time that is sanctified by fixed dates, and the sanctified time that results from an esoteric counting system in parallel with the standard dates, the Torah now turns to the commands regarding the Menora and the twelve loaves

In order to focus on the special emphasis found in these commands, we will compare our verses to the parallel commands in parashat Tetzaveh:

Tetzaveh ([Shemot 27: 20-21](#)):

You shall command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of beaten olives for lighting, for kindling lamps regularly. Aharon and his sons shall set them up in the Tent of Meeting, outside the curtain which is over the testimony, from evening until morning before God. It shall be an eternal law for all their generations, from the Israelites.

Emor ([Vayikra 24:1-4](#)):

Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of beaten olives for lighting, for kindling lamps REGULARLY. Aharon shall set them up in the Tent of Meeting outside the curtain of the testimony from evening to morning before God REGULARLY; it is an eternal law for all their generations. He shall set up the lamps on the pure lampstand before God REGULARLY.

Precisely because of the great similarity between the two texts, the additional text emphasized in our parasha - "tamid," regularly - stands out. These three short sentences end with "tamid," and remind us of a repeating refrain (chorus) that is trying to emphasize a point.

In the command for the 12 loaves we find a similar emphasis: "He shall arrange them before God REGULARLY every Shabbat day" (ibid 8). What is the meaning of the command to do this regularly?

First, one must realize that the phrase tamid in the biblical text is explained in two ways: meaning "always" and referring to regularity. No matter the explanation, the Torah is emphasizing that in the Tent of God everything occurs regularly and continually. There are no interruptions, only absolute

holiness that fills time in its totality. In this context we are reminded of the daily sacrifice, the Tamid, where again regularity is emphasized. It would seem that this sacrifice does not appear here because the Torah is focusing on what went on inside the tabernacle - the menorah and the shulchan (table)..

In light of this, it becomes clear why these commands appear here, after the chapter on the holidays. Within the mundane, outside world, there are two types of counting used to sanctify time - Shabbat which occurs independently of the real world, and thus testifies to Creation, and the festivals, which fall on specific dates and celebrate different events. There is one additional way in which holiness occurs, and that is singular to the House of God. There, in the Temple, the Menora is lit "tamid" (regularly) and bread is placed on the Table "tamid." There, time is continuously sanctified, totally and without breaks. The Torah writes the command about the "tamid" of the Temple here, after the chapter on the sanctification of time in the outside world, in order to emphasize the tension between the two types of sanctity.

Visit our website: <http://vbm-torah.org>