

Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash
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Shabbat and the Mishkan

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**A. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SHABBAT OBSERVANCE
AND THE MISHKAN**

The first part of parashat Ki-Tisa (30:11-31:11) continues the theme of the previous parashot, dealing with the building of the Mishkan. Starting from 31:18, the Torah returns to the narrative, describing the events surrounding Moshe's ascent to Mt. Sinai and his forty-day stay there. In between the seemingly concluding command about the Mishkan (31:1-11) and the debacle of the Golden Calf (31:18 onwards), there is a short section of six verses (31:12-17) containing the mitzva of Shabbat.

What is the reason for the appearance of this mitzva here? The well-known response of many of the commentators is that the mitzva of Shabbat in our parasha is related to the preceding mitzva concerning the building of the Mishkan. The appearance of the mitzva of Shabbat as a conclusion to the section on the Mishkan is meant to teach us that the construction of the Mishkan – important as it is – does not override the sanctity of Shabbat.

What is the source upon which this supposed connection is based? Why must the mitzva of Shabbat here be regarded as being related to the command to build the Mishkan and as serving as its conclusion, rather than being viewed as an independent command? After all, the section itself makes no mention of the Mishkan and the activities surrounding its construction, and its introduction (verses 12-13: "And God spoke to Moshe, saying: 'And you, speak to Bnei Yisrael, saying...") gives the impression that it is indeed an independent command.

The commentators provide several answers to this question; we shall examine three types of answers.

**1. Close analysis of the WORDING of the
SHABBAT section**

A few commentators – Rashi being the first among them – derive the connection between Shabbat and the Mishkan from a close analysis of the wording of the section on Shabbat.

Rashi's first clue is to be found in the command to Moshe at the very beginning of this section: "AND YOU, speak to Bnei Yisrael...":

"And you' – Although I have given you the responsibility of commanding them concerning the building of the Mishkan, let it not appear of little importance in your eyes to override Shabbat because of that construction."

The primary link indicated by the commentators is the word with which the actual mitzva begins: (13) "BUT (akh) you shall keep My Shabbatot." Rashi comments:

"Although you will be eagerly engaged in the work [of the Mishkan], Shabbat should not be set aside because of it."

This verse contains something else that requires our attention: why is the plural, "Shabbatot," used? If we assume that this verse comes to obligate Shabbat observance during the period of the construction of the Mishkan, then the use of the plural is understood: Keep the Shabbatot during that period.

**2. The context in which the mitzva of Shabbat
appears**

Ramban (31:13) deduces from the very juxtaposition of the end of the command concerning the Mishkan and the mitzva of Shabbat that the Torah means to forbid construction work for the Mishkan on Shabbat: "THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MISHKAN – WHICH DOES NOT SET ASIDE SHABBAT, FOR GOD WARNS OF THAT HERE."

The command to build the Mishkan was uttered as one long speech by God to Moshe, with its beginning at the start of parashat Teruma (25:1) and its festive conclusion (echoing the introduction) towards the end of parashat Tetzaveh, after the section on the daily burnt offerings (end of chapter 29, verses 43-46).

But chapters 30-31, which follow this conclusion, also belong to the command concerning the Mishkan. These chapters are comprised of seven short masoretic sections, all serving as appendices to the long command that preceded them.

The first appendix concerns the incense altar (30:1-10), which is most closely related to the main command section concerning the Mishkan. The incense altar is one of the vessels of the Mishkan that stands in the Sanctuary, like the Table and the Menora. (The question of why this section is not included together with those about the other vessels, at the beginning of parashat Teruma, was the subject of my shiur on parashat Tetzaveh in 5760.) The clear connection between this first appendix and the preceding long command finds expression in the fact that there is no interruption between them, no introduction along the lines of, "And God spoke to Moshe." The

section on the incense altar therefore represents a direct continuation of the long command that began at the start of parashat Teruma.

Let us examine the next five appendices – those that appear at the beginning of parashat Ki-Tisa. Each begins with an introduction marking it as a new command: "And God spoke to Moshe, saying," or "And God said to Moshe." The content of the appendices will clarify for us both the reason for their being appendices (rather than part of the main command) and the logic of their internal order.

The second appendix – "When you count the heads of Bnei Yisrael..." – is a mitzva to conduct a census by means of the half-shekel contribution. Only at its conclusion do we discover the connection between this census and the construction of the Mishkan (30:16): "And you shall take the silver of atonement from Bnei Yisrael and give it for the service of the Sanctuary." This appendix therefore appears near the beginning of the list because it complements the command to collect the voluntary contributions for the Mishkan, with which parashat Teruma opens.

The third appendix concerns the construction of the washbasin. This vessel is not actually used in the service of the Mishkan, but rather helps the kohanim prepare for their service. Therefore it has no place in the main command. It follows immediately after the two previous appendices because it is still one of the vessels of the Mishkan (its place is in the courtyard, like the sacrificial altar), and therefore this section corresponds to the commands concerning the other vessels, which appear later on in parashat Teruma.

The fourth and fifth appendices concern the preparation of the anointing oil and the incense. These are not vessels at all, but rather mixtures of substances whose preparation is a precondition for the operation of the Mishkan (which must be anointed with oil) and for the execution of one of the services therein (offering of the incense). The reason for the juxtaposition of these two appendices and their location – following the construction of the washbasin – is clear.

The sixth appendix deals with the appointment of the personalities who are to manage the construction process: Betzalel and Oholiav. The reason for this appendix appearing near the end is obvious: the Torah is no longer discussing the artifacts related to the construction, but rather the people who will fashion them. Only at the end of the list of all that needs to be made do we need a command as to who is to perform all the work. For this reason, this appendix includes a brief summary of all the parts of the Mishkan whose construction is entrusted to them.

The seventh appendix is the mitzva of Shabbat. Here the Torah addresses the proper TIMES for the construction of the Mishkan – or, more precisely, the times that are NOT appropriate for construction. The mitzva is located here for two reasons. Firstly, it is appropriate that the mitzva of Shabbat feature as the SEVENTH appendix. Moreover, it is also appropriate that this mitzva be placed furthest away from the command concerning the construction of the Mishkan, for the connection between

them is inverse: Shabbat is not set aside for the construction of the Mishkan. Indeed, the mitzva of Shabbat here makes no explicit mention of the command to build the Mishkan. Its introduction – "And God spoke to Moshe saying, And you, speak to Bnei Yisrael" – is also longer than those of all the preceding appendices, thereby creating a more substantial partition between this mitzva and what preceded it. (This summarizing list of the parts of the Mishkan, listed in the preceding appendix, also help to create this partition.)

3. The mitzva of Shabbat in parashat Vayakhel

The connection between the mitzva of Shabbat in our parasha and the preceding command to build the Mishkan can also be deduced from a third source – the brief command to Bnei Yisrael concerning the construction of the Mishkan at the beginning of parashat Vayakhel:

(35:1) "And Moshe gathered all the congregation of Bnei Yisrael and he said to them: These are the things that God has commanded to be done.

(2) Six days shall you do work, and the seventh day will be sanctified for you, a Shabbat of rest to God; anyone who performs work on it will die."

Verse 2 here is simply a repetition – with slight changes – of the main verse of the Shabbat mitzva in parashat Ki-Tisa (verse 15). In parashat Vayakhel, the mitzva appears immediately after the beginning of the command about building the Mishkan in verse 1: "These are the things that God has commanded to be done." Ramban comments there:

"He says, 'These are the things that God has commanded to do' concerning the construction of the Mishkan and all its vessels and its service, and he then mentions Shabbat first, teaching that 'SIX DAYS SHALL YOU DO' THE WORK OF 'THESE ARE THE THINGS' – but not on the seventh day, which is sanctified to God. From here we learn that the work of the Mishkan does not set aside Shabbat."

Why does Moshe mention first the mitzva of Shabbat, which was communicated to him only at the end of the command concerning the Mishkan? He does this because of the practical nature of his words to the nation. The prohibition against work on Shabbat, applying even to the construction of the Mishkan, is severe as well as being vital from a practical point of view. Therefore, it should be made known at the start, before embarking on the work.

In four different places in Sefer Shemot the Torah explains the prohibition of work on Shabbat in a similar manner, but a comparison between them reveals a difference between the first two and the latter two:

The Ten Commandments (20:9-10):

"Six days

shall you work

and perform all your work

and the seventh day is a Shabbat..."

Parashat Mishpatim (23:12):

"Six days

shall you do

your actions

and the seventh day is a Shabbat..."

Parashat Ki-Tisa (31:15):

"Six days

shall work be done

and on the seventh day there shall be a Shabbat of rest..."

Parashat Vayahkel (35:2):

"Six days

work shall be done

and on the seventh day... a Shabbat of rest..."

The first two verses here address one directly, in the second person, thus making him the subject of both sentences. The work that is performed on the six weekdays but prohibited on Shabbat is attributed by the text to the person: "Your work," "your actions." The two latter verses, in contrast, do not address anyone directly; rather, they prohibit "work" in general. Therefore, it is the work that is the subject of these two

sentences, and its performance during the six weekdays is expressed in the passive form: "shall be done."

What is the reason for these differences? The answer seems to be that in the latter two verses the Torah is prohibiting work related to the Mishkan. It is not addressing each individual, but rather comes to prohibit the actual construction of the Mishkan, which is performed by a joining of forces among a great many people. The work of the Mishkan is not "your work" but rather work for the sake of Heaven – and despite this, it is permitted only on the six week-days. "On the seventh day there shall be a Shabbat of rest."

B. "BUT YOU SHALL OBSERVE MY SHABBATOT" – TWO SHABBATOT

Let us now turn to the details of the mitzva of Shabbat in our parasha. The numerous repetitions are the most obvious and the most puzzling phenomenon in this parasha. What is the logic behind them?

We may present the content of this section as follows:

(12) "And God said to Moshe, saying:

(13) And you – speak to Bnei Yisrael, saying:

A. But you shall observe My Shabbatot,

FOR IT IS A SIGN BETWEEN ME AND YOU
FOR ALL YOUR GENERATIONS

To know that I am God, Who sanctifies you.

B. (14) AND YOU SHALL OBSERVE THE
SHABBAT

for it is sanctified for you.

C. Those who profane it SHALL SURELY DIE

for ANYONE WHO PERFORMS WORK UPON
IT –

that soul will be cut off from among its people.

(15) Six days shall work be done, and on the seventh day there shall be a Shabbat of rest, sanctified to God.

C1. ANYONE WHO PERFORMS WORK ON
THE DAY OF SHABBAT SHALL SURELY DIE.

B1. (16) AND BNEI YISRAEL SHALL
OBSERVE THE SHABBAT

to mark the Shabbat for their generations, an eternal covenant.

A1. (17) BETWEEN ME AND BNEI YISRAEL, IT IS A SIGN FOREVER,

for during six days God made the heavens and the earth

and on the seventh day He ceased and rested."

The central axis (between C and C1) contains the fundamental definition usually used in the Torah for the Shabbat day: it is the seventh day, "the day of ceasing from work," that follows six days of labor.

The halves on each side of this axis each contain three sentences. Two deal with the essence of Shabbat – the essence that is the reason for Shabbat observance - and one with the punishment for anyone who performs labor on this day. The structure as represented above demonstrates quite clearly the difference in reasoning between A and A1, and between B and B1.

In A, the Shabbat serves as a sign that "I am God Who sanctifies you," while in A1 it testifies that "during six days God made...."

In B, the reason for observing Shabbat is "because it is sanctified for you," while in B1 the reason is because it is an "eternal covenant."

In the first half, Israel is addressed in the second person plural (except in C, where the Torah talks about someone who desecrates Shabbat in the third person singular, as in C1, and the reason for this is clear). But in the second half the command is addressed to Israel in the third person plural: "AND BNEI YISRAEL SHALL OBSERVE... FOR ALL THEIR GENERATIONS," "between Me and BNEI YISRAEL." This difference is particularly noticeable when we compare the corresponding sentences of each set.

The third couple, C and C1, where the above difference does not exist (since both address the Shabbat desecrator in the third person singular), nevertheless contains another difference. In C we find the expression "those who profane it" (mechaleleiha), which has no parallel in C1, and likewise the punishment of "karet" (the soul being cut off from the nation) is absent from C1.

It is possible to explain all these differences by means of a single fundamental distinction between the two halves?

The most outstanding element in the reasoning of the first half is the use of the root "k-d-sh" (sanctify) and its opposite, "ch-l-l" (desecrate) with regard to the mitzva of Shabbat. In A, Shabbat serves as a sign "to know that I am God WHO SANCTIFIES

YOU;" in B the reason for the requirement to observe Shabbat is FOR IT IS SANCTIFIED FOR YOU;" in C the expression "those who profane it" appears. The foundation for this is to be found in the central axis – that the seventh day, the "Shabbat of rest," is "SANCTIFIED TO GOD." But God gave the Shabbat to Israel, and their observance of it demonstrates to the world that "I AM GOD WHO SANCTIFIES YOU." Hence, once Israel has been given his gift of sanctity, they are required to observe it "FOR IT IS SANCTIFIED FOR YOU." One who performs labor on this day PROFANES its sanctity, and therefore his punishment – in certain circumstances – comes from the One Who gave Shabbat to His nation: "that soul will be cut off from its people."

The motif of sanctity related to Shabbat (and its opposite, desecration) is completely absent from the second half of the section. The transition here to the third person plural serves as a transition from the imperative case to something that may be understood as a narrative: "And Bnei Yisrael shall observe the Shabbat." This is a description of what will happen: BNEI YISRAEL will accept upon themselves to observe the Shabbat for all their generations, because THEY DESIRE to be joined in an eternal covenant with God. It is they who desire to observe it, and they who punish (in courts) anyone who performs labor on this day. Shabbat here serves as a sign that Israel behaves like the Creator: just as "during six days God made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He ceased and rested," so for them "six days shall work be done, and on the seventh day there will be a Shabbat of rest" (quoting the central axis).

This parasha therefore deals with two "Shabbatot" – two aspects of Shabbat – and although both serve as a sign between God and Israel, they do not testify to the same thing.

The Shabbat of the first half is directed from Above downwards; it is a gift of sanctity that God bestows upon His nation, and it is a sign that He thereby sanctifies them with something of His sanctity. This is a transcendental Shabbat; the concepts relating to it are "sanctity" and "profanity."

The Shabbat of the second half is the Shabbat of Israel; it bursts forth and rises from below upwards. This Shabbat is also a sign between God and Israel: it represents Bnei Yisrael's following the example of God in the act of creation. "Israel's Shabbat" is a human reaction to the Divine gift bestowed upon them.

C. SHABBAT AND THE MISHKAN – REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COVENANT BETWEEN GOD AND ISRAEL

Why is it specifically in our parasha that the reason for Shabbat is given as being a sign of the bilateral link between God and Israel? Is it somehow related to the special context in which the mitzva is found in our parasha, concluding the command to construct the Mishkan?

In my shiur on parashat Teruma in 5760, I dwelt on the function of the Sanctuary as a place of testimony: it realizes and completes the covenant between God and Israel as set down at Mt. Sinai. More than anywhere else, this function of the Mishkan finds expression in the ark and the covering upon it, which are "the principal artifacts of the Mishkan" (Ramban); "for the sake

of the ark... it was necessary to construct a Mishkan" (Rashbam). An examination of the mitzva to make the ark, at the beginning of parashat Teruma, showed that the ark with its coverings and the keruvim represent the mutual relationship between God and Israel inherent in the covenant of Sinai. The ark, with its poles that "are not to be removed from it," represents the human side of this covenant (Israel), while the covering and the keruvim, all created as a single unit, represent its Divine aspect.

This mutuality between the partners to the covenant – Israel and God – is expressed in the very construction of the Mishkan. Israel, by participating in every possible way in the construction, show their desire to have God's Shekhina among them: "That He should have a home among them, dedicated to His Name, where He can speak to Moshe and command Bnei Yisrael" (Ramban at the beginning of parashat Teruma). The Divine promise, "I shall dwell among them," "And I shall meet you there and speak with you," expresses the completion of the human endeavor by the realization of its purpose – God's presence among them. The short verse at the beginning of the command to make the Mishkan – "AND THEY SHALL MAKE ME a Mikdash AND I SHALL DWELL AMONG THEM" is a succinct expression of this mutuality expressed in the Mishkan.

The conclusion of the command to build the Mishkan teaches that Shabbat, too – like the Mishkan – is a sign of the mutual covenant between God and Israel: "But you shall observe My Shabbatot for it is a sign between Me and you;" "And Bnei Yisrael shall observe the Shabbat... between Me and Bnei Yisrael it is an eternal sign." But the order, when it comes to Shabbat, is the opposite of that of the Mishkan. In the Mishkan, the human effort precedes and represents a precondition for the Divine completion – first "THEY SHALL MAKE Me a Mikdash" and only thereafter "I SHALL DWELL among them" (and this is indeed the order of events in reality). When it comes to Shabbat, first the Shabbat is given as a gift of sanctity to Israel, "to know that I AM GOD Who sanctifies you," and only thereafter "Bnei Yisrael shall observe the Shabbat... for all their generations, an eternal covenant."

It becomes clear, then, why the construction of the Mishkan cannot override the sanctity of Shabbat. The work of the Mishkan, which is a human endeavor "from below upwards," cannot set aside Shabbat, which is fundamentally a gift from God to Israel, to sanctify them with His sanctity. Human activity, by its very definition – although performed as part of the covenant between God and Israel – can be performed only during those "six days" in which "work shall be done," namely, the work of the Mishkan.

(Translated by Kaeren Fish.

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