



Zachor & Shamor

At the end of Moshe's life, before taking leave of his people, Moshe saw fit to teach the generation of Israelites who would soon enter the Land of Israel. This new generation must hear G-d's laws too. Therefore, we are not surprised to find material from the four earlier Books of the Torah repeated in the fifth book.

Let us compare the Fourth Commandment as it appears in Shemot and in Devarim.

In Shemot, the rationale for Shabbat is Creation: Shabbat is a testament to our belief in the Creation and the Creator. On the other hand, in Devarim, the Shabbat is commanded as a reminder of our enslavement in Egypt, and of our liberation by G-d's Hand. This is no mere explanatory comment; here are two vastly different, potentially contradictory reasons for the observance of Shabbat.

In reality, the two different rationales for Shabbat do not contradict one another. Rather, they teach the same law from two different vantage points. The formulation in Shemot states: "For in six days G-d made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore G-d blessed the Shabbat day and sanctified it." There is one thing missing here – namely, Man. Why should humankind keep Shabbat? Moreover, if Shabbat exists simply because G-d created, this law should be universal, and not apply only to members of the Covenant, to Jews alone. This Commandment is theocentric, reflecting G-d's perspective. The seventh day is holy because G-d created for six days and then desisted from creating. This is echoed in the verse in Bereishit,¹ uttered at

the very dawn of Creation: "And G-d blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because on it, He rested from all His work which G-d created to make." The fact that G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it does not necessarily affect Man; only when Man is commanded to keep that day in a similar or imitative fashion is he brought into the frame, into G-d's frame of reference, as it were.

On the other hand, the rationale for Shabbat as stated in Devarim is of a totally different order, drawn from a totally different sphere. We were enslaved, and G-d rescued us. "And remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt and that the Almighty your G-d brought you out from there with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm; therefore, the Almighty your G-d commanded you to keep the Shabbat day." This formulation is homocentric. The former slaves are addressed in a particularly compelling way: as slaves, they had no freedom. Now, as free men and women, they are free every day. They have been given all seven days of the week to pursue their individuality, and with this Commandment, G-d asks that they put aside one-seventh of their gift in return. Seen from this perspective, Shabbat becomes a moral imperative for those whose shackles were broken, homage to their liberator.

The two rationales are not contradictory; one speaks from G-d's perspective, teaching us that the seventh day is holy and unique. The other speaks from the human perspective, requiring Man to rest as well. Had it not been for the first rationale, Man would be able to choose his own day of rest; each and every day would be an equally valid candidate, and no one

day would have religious superiority over the others. On the other hand, with only the first formulation, Man would remain outside the picture; he would have no part in the sanctity of the seventh day just as he was not a party to Creation.

Both of these perspectives were taught by G-d, simultaneously, at Sinai. Yet each was recorded, emphasized, at different junctures in the history of the Jewish people. The generation that left Egypt would certainly have no trouble embracing the idea that one day each week should be a day of rest. Therefore, the generation that left Egypt, the generation of liberated slaves that stood at Sinai, was taught about the other reason for Shabbat: this day is hallowed because of Creation, and by emulating G-d and keeping the Shabbat we forge a powerful, holy relationship with Him.

The generation that stood poised to enter the Land of Israel knew neither work nor slavery. It was this generation that needed to hear about the human side of Shabbat. They had to be taught that the seventh day is not exclusively Divine in nature. The human and social implications of Shabbat would not have been intuitively understood by those who were sustained by miracles for 40 years.

1 Bereishit 2:3.

Adapted from Echoes of Eden Sefer Devarim, from OUPress/Geffen

Rabbi Ari Kahn is Director of the Overseas Student Program at Bar-Ilan University, where he is a senior lecturer in Jewish Studies