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בס"ד

Parashat Ki Tissa Part III Regarding the Sabbath

1. Multiple Concepts

When G-d concluded transmitting to Moses instructions for construction of the Tabernacle, its furnishings and services, while Moses was still on the mountaintop, G-d provided him details regarding the Sabbath. This is the only “extraneous” subject attached to Tabernacle instructions before we are told that G-d gave Moses the tablets, the official conclusion of Moses’ mountaintop audience (taking the chapters of Tabernacle instructions to be in chronological order, occurring before the tablets episode). Obviously, there is a significant association between the Tabernacle and the Sabbath.*

The Sabbath legislation begins with אַךְ אֵת שַׁבָּתֶי תִּשְׁמְרוּ (“Nevertheless, My Sabbaths you must observe” [Exod. 31:13]). Beginning a statement with “nevertheless” qualifies the preceding passage. It teaches that Tabernacle construction, important as it is, may not be performed on the Sabbath, a day that G-d designates as His, *shabbetotai*. Although cessation from *melakha* (constructive labor) on the Sabbath was already commanded in the Decalogue and subsequently repeated, it might have been thought that construction of the Tabernacle – labor performed for the purpose of G-d’s abode – would be exempt from the prohibition, so the opening statement of our passage clarifies that point.

The Sabbath precept appears in a number of contexts in the Torah and is formulated in several distinctive manners, variously accentuating different aspects of this innovative legislation. The Genesis formulation of the Sabbath (Gen. 2:1-3) presents it as the culmination of the six days of creation. The message there is that G-d presented man with a good and harmonious world, ready-made for him to work in and develop. The Sabbath completes creation in that it suffuses it

with blessing and sanctity, thus elevating its meaning and purpose, and enjoins man to relate to the world in a nonmaterialistic manner with responsible stewardship. In Exodus 16, besides the Sabbath being viewed as a day sanctified to G-d, it is described as His gift to Israel that is accompanied by His blessings, manifest in His providing extra sustenance on the other days of the week to compensate for the cessation of work on that day (Exod. 16:22-30). The implication is that one not fear refraining from labor on the Sabbath, for G-d has so structured His creation that the sincere Sabbath-observer will achieve success during the other days that will compensate for the “loss” on the Sabbath.

The Exodus Decalogue (20:8-11) mandates the Sabbath as a day of rest for every member of the nation, explicitly mentioning one’s sons and daughters, male slaves and female slaves, animals and strangers in your gates (those dependent on you). It places G-d’s creation of the world in six days and His resting on the seventh as a foundational principle behind establishment of this institution. The Deuteronomy Decalogue (Deut. 5:12-15), on the other hand, emphasizes the humanitarian and social justice aspects of the Sabbath and raises one’s responsibilities to the welfare of his slaves to an unprecedented level: “in order that your male slave and female slave rest as you do.” It further directs the Israelites to remember that they had been slaves in Egypt from whence Hashem had redeemed them and “therefore Hashem your G-d commanded you to fulfill the Sabbath” (v. 15). Obviously, the Sabbath is to serve as a springboard to prompt the Israelites to be concerned for the plight of the less fortunate in society.

The Sabbath formulation in the law code attached to the Exodus Decalogue is part of a context that emphasizes the importance of justice and concern for

the underprivileged. After prescribing that the land lie fallow for the seventh year so that the needy may eat of it and also the animals (Exod. 23:10-11), the Torah speaks of observing the Sabbath day. Its purpose is given as “in order that your ox and donkey may rest and your slave [lit: son of your maid-servant] and the stranger may become refreshed” (v.12).

In our passage, the Sabbath is presented with a different emphasis than in its previous attestations and its words and clauses are arranged in a most artistic form (a matter we shall expand upon later in this study). Hashem defines the day as “a sign between Me and you throughout your generations that you may know that I, Hashem, sanctify you” (31:13). This highlights the fact that Israel is a holy nation only through the activity of Hashem.

The Sabbath is also described as an eternal covenant between Hashem and Israel (בְּרִית עוֹלָם) as well as “an everlasting sign that in six days Hashem created heaven and earth and on the seventh day He ceased from work and was refreshed” (v. 17). The dire consequences for violating this holy day by performance of prohibited labor are spelled out.

2. Sabbath-Tabernacle Association

Placement of the Sabbath passage in immediate proximity to instructions for the Tabernacle reflects much more than the qualification that Tabernacle construction is not to be performed on the Sabbath. Indeed, the Sabbath-Tabernacle association reflects a certain congruence in concept and purpose. Both are expressions of holiness, bringing this most important value to bear on the two basic spheres of reality. The Sabbath is the sanctification of a portion of time while the Tabernacle involves the sanctification of a specific area of space. From these domains sanctity is to emanate to the rest of the reality they are part of.

The integral linkage between the two is manifest in Leviticus 19:30 and again in 26:2, where the two, and only those two, are joined in the same verse: “You shall keep My Sabbaths and venerate my sanctuary, I am Hashem.” (The Talmud explains an aspect of this linkage as defining the categories of work that are forbidden on the Sabbath, the thirty-nine categories of *melakha* that were necessary for Tabernacle construction.)

The Torah accounts of creation, the Sabbath and the Tabernacle contain a number of striking correspondences that connect the three and clearly point to another dimension in G-d’s intention with the Tabernacle. (See Nehama Leibowitz, citing Buber, *Iyunim BeSefer Shemot*, Heb., pps. 350-352.)

- Immediately preceding the instructions for the Tabernacle the Torah states that Moses ascended the mountain and G-d’s presence abode on it for six days. On the seventh day He summoned Moses, whereupon Moses entered the cloud; he remained on the mountain for forty days. To what end are the six days and the seventh singled out from the forty? In Leibowitz’ words: “In six days Hashem made heaven and earth. The responsibility for construction of Tabernacle and furnishings He placed upon man, but its plans He formulated in the six days, and on the seventh day summoned Moses and Moses was shown the plans” (p. 350). This is the frame of reference of Hashem’s several remarks to Moses concerning Tabernacle-related instructions, “as you were shown on the mountain,” in slightly varying formulations.

- Genesis describes G-d’s completion of creation first as וְנִכְלְוּ (“they were completed”), in the passive form (Gen. 2:1), followed by וַיִּכְלֶה אֱלֹהִים (“G-d completed”), in the active form (2:2). Similarly, Exodus describes the Tabernacle’s completion first as וַתִּכְלֶה (“it was completed” [Exod. 39:32]), followed by וַיִּכְלֶה מֹשֶׁה (“Moses completed” [40:33]).

- Genesis states: וַיִּרְאֵהוּ אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד (“G-d saw all that He made and behold it was very good” [Gen. 1:31]). Exodus states: וַיִּרְאֵהוּ מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל תְּמִלְאֲכָהּ וְהִנֵּה עָשׂוּ אֹתָהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' בְּעֵשׂוֹ (“Moses saw all the work and behold they made it in accordance with G-d’s command, thus they made it” [Exod. 39:43]). In the human sphere, doing something in accordance with G-d’s command parallels G-d’s “very good.”

- In Genesis, “G-d blessed the seventh day” (Gen. 2:3). In Exodus, “Moses blessed them [the Israelites] (Exod. 39:43).

The conclusion is inescapable: G-d made a dwelling place for man; man is to make a dwelling place for G-d, so that His plan of a world of harmony and blessing for man based on holiness will become a reality.

In our study *Parashat Pekudei Part II: Completion of the Tabernacle* we will expand on these correspondences, pointing out the strategic locations in the text of the above-cited Exodus verses.

A distinction will subsequently be drawn between the construction phase of the sanctuary and the laws governing its actual functioning. In the latter state, and only in the sanctuary, certain services involving acts that would otherwise be violations of the Sabbath are prescribed. Sacrifices are prescribed for the Sabbath day; indeed, the daily sacrificial service is expanded for that day. Thus, besides the two ‘olah lambs sacrificed each day, one each morning and one each afternoon, two additional ‘olah lambs are sacrificed on the Sabbath. Perhaps this is intended to transform the weekly totals from fourteen to sixteen, that is, from the symbolism of seven to eight. This is consistent with covenant symbolism in the Torah in which the number eight and its multiples are signifiers of the covenant, apparently having superseded the symbolism of the number seven. (See our study *On Number Symbolism in the Torah from the Work of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon.*)

3. On Structure

The *Ki Tissa* Sabbath passage is formulated in a remarkably artistic fashion. The substantive portion of the passage contains eighty-three words (beginning from the word אָרְבָּע, excluding the eleven words of superscription and the introductory instruction to speak to the Israelites, in accordance with well-established precedent), with the exact center word being שַׁבָּת (the Sabbath). There are two correlating sections, one on each side of that middle word, each comprising forty-one words and converging at that midpoint word. These sections form an extensive chiasm (inversion in sequential order of corresponding literary elements, as in A-B-C-C'-B'-A', sometimes, such as in our case, with a central word or phrase, denoted X in our listing below). The chiasm possesses seven pairs of items, appropriate for a passage concerning the Sabbath. (However, in accordance with an interpretative principle that we will touch upon shortly, it may be seen to contain eight pairs, counting the central component, in harmony with the covenantal concept being articulated.) The chiasm highlights most of the passage’s key components, as

follows (adapted from Y. Abishur’s comments in *Olam Hatanakh*):

- A - v. 13: אֶת שַׁבְּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ
- B - v. 13: אֹת הִיא
- C - v. 13: בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם
- D - v. 13: לְדַרְתֵּיכֶם
- E - v. 14: וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת
- F - v. 14: מִחֻלְלֶיהָ מוֹת יוּמָת
- G - v. 14: כָּל הָעֹשֶׂה בָּהּ מְלָאכָה
- X - v. 15: שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן קִדְשׁ לַה'
- G' - v. 15: כָּל הָעֹשֶׂה מְלָאכָה בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת
- F' - v. 15: מוֹת יוּמָת
- E' - v. 16: וַיִּשְׁמְרוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת
- D' - v. 16: לְדַרְתֶּם
- C' - v. 17: בֵּינִי וּבֵין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
- B' - v. 17: אֹת הִיא
- A' - v. 17: וּבְיוֹם הַשַּׁבְּעִי שַׁבַּת וַיִּנְפָּשׁ

Straightforward correspondences between the two sections are also present. The closings of each of the two sections use similar phrases: verse 15 states “Six days may work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be a Sabbath” and verse 17b states “For on six days Hashem made heaven and earth and on the seventh day He ceased from work.” Also, “It is holy to you” of verse 14, just before the center, corresponds with “holy to Hashem” of verse 15, right after the center.

There is a strong covenantal backdrop in this passage in that the ת-ב-ש stem in all forms is attested eight times. In addition, as Ronald Benun has pointed out, if we begin counting from the first attestation of the ת-ב-ש stem (counting שַׁבְּתֹתַי in v. 13, the third word in the substantive portion, as word one) the eightieth word is the eighth and last attestation of the ת-ב-ש stem, just before the passage’s conclusion. Remarkably, the exact two middle words of these eighty words (fortieth word forward from שַׁבְּתֹתַי and fortieth word back from the last attestation of the ת-ב-ש stem, שַׁבַּת of v. 17) are שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן, which we have already seen to be part of the chiasm center. Accordingly, it is likely that the chiasm, comprising seven pairs, was also intended to be viewed as comprising eight elements, counting the center.

Further, analogous to what we have seen in the Exodus 6 analysis regarding the strategic placement of G-d’s Tetragrammaton name (in what clearly is also

an extensive and sophisticated chiasm passage), sub-patterns are present in the location of key words. Counting forward from the middle word *shabbaton*, considering it as word one, the eighth word is *shabbat*; counting that *shabbat* as word one, the eighth word forward is again *shabbat*. Counting forward from the first of the *ת-ב-ש* stems, *שָׁבַתְתִּי*, the sixteenth word is *הַשָּׁבֹת*.

The Sabbath passage completes the Tabernacle section and the narrative resumes with the golden calf apostasy. When reconciliation between G-d and Israel was achieved and Moses transmitted instructions for Tabernacle construction to Israel, he began with the Sabbath (Exod. 35:1-3). Some commentators consider this a feature of literary style, a chiasm: in G-d's communication it was Tabernacle followed by the Sabbath while in Moses' transmittal it was the Sabbath followed by the Tabernacle. Possibly.

However, if we take G-d's Tabernacle instructions in accordance with textual sequence (as we are inclined to do), which means that they preceded the golden calf and Moses' presentation of the instructions was after it, it is doubtful if he would have chosen to be celebratory and artistic at that point, emphasizing the covenant. The Israelites had not as yet proven their repentance and Moses could not take it for granted. Placing the Sabbath first may merely be Moses' way of strongly cautioning Israel that it must be careful not to violate that law even for sanctuary construction. It may be significant that his Sabbath formulation

comprises twenty-four words, a multiple of eight, to merely allude to the covenantal connection which he is not going to explicitly mention, although it was so prominently highlighted in G-d's communication.

In the larger context, it surely is significant that Moses' presentation to Israel of Sabbath instructions (Exod. 35) following the nation's transgression of the golden calf does not possess any of the artistry or celebratory spirit of G-d's communication. This supports the view that G-d's transmission of Tabernacle instructions preceded the golden calf while Moses' presentation followed it, before Israel proved its worthiness, and consequently was of a minimalist nature, lacking optimism and emotion. Celebration, joy and splendor were reserved for the time when and if the nation proved itself worthy in G-d's estimation by an indication that He accepted their repentance. We will elaborate on this in our *Parashat Vayakhel* study.

Endnote

* It appears significant that the Sabbath passage is introduced with the seventh and final instance from the beginning of the Tabernacle instructional section (Exod. 25:1) that the Torah records that "Hashem spoke to Moses," employing either of the standard words for "spoke," *וַיִּדְבֹר* or *וַיֹּאמֶר*.

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