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Subject: Netvort : parshas Emor 5762

Keep Going

By Rabbi Joshua (continuously known as The Hoffer) Hoffman

In the latter part of parshas Emor, we are presented with a description of the various festivals of the year. We are told that God said to Moshe, "Speak to the children of Israel and say to them : God's appointed festivals, which you shall designate, etc., these are My appointed festivals" (Vayikra 23 : 1-2). Curiously, this section of the parsha begins with a description of Shabbos. What, asks Rashi, is the connection between Shabbos and the festivals? He answers that this juxtaposition comes to teach us that whoever profanes the festivals is considered as if he profaned the Shabbos, and whoever upholds the festivals is considered as if he has upheld the Shabbos. The super-commentary on Rashi, Nachalas Yaakov, by Rabbi Yaakov of Lissa, points out that Rashi's comments are referring to the heavenly court, because in beis din, the rabbinic court here on earth that tries cases, the desecration of Shabbos incurs the death penalty, while the desecration of Yom Tov is punished by lashes. Be that as it may, I believe that Rashi's comment, taken from the Sifra, indicates that there is an underlying, thematic connection between Shabbos and Yom Tov. I would like to explore what that connection may be.

The rabbis tell us that if the Jewish nation would observe two Shabbosos, they would be immediately redeemed. Why is it necessary for them to observe two Shabbosos for this to happen? Why doesn't the observance of one Shabbos merit redemption? My teacher, Rabbi Aharon Soloveichik, zt'l, explained that the idea is that we need to observe Shabbos not only on Shabbos itself, but also during the week, by carrying the spirit of Shabbos into the week. On Shabbos we pause from our weekday activity and recognize that God created the world and is its Master. We need to carry that recognition into the week, as well, and be motivated by it. When the entire Jewish nation does this, then it will merit redemption. Thus, Shabbos serves to infuse a measure of holiness into the days of the week, as well. Perhaps this is the reason that the Torah prefaces its prescription for Shabbos with the words, "Six days labor shall be done, and the seventh day is a day of complete rest" (Vayikra 23 : 3).

After mentioning Shabbos, the Torah goes on to describe the festival of Pesach. On the second day of Pesach, we are told, we must bring the Omer offering. Then, we must count fifty days, after which we are to bring the offering of the first crop, and observe the festival of Shavuot. The rabbis explain that we actually count forty-nine days, which is a counting that leads up to the fiftieth day. We are also told to count seven weeks, and therefore, the rabbis tell us that the mitzvah of Sefiras HaOmer, counting the days from the Omer is two-fold. We must count both in terms of days and in terms of weeks. Rabbi Nochum Perlow, the previous Novominsker Rebbe, and father of the current Novominsker Rebbe, Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, explained that counting in this two-fold way serves to connect the days of the week with

Shabbos, bringing the spirit of Shabbos into the week. Although Rabbi Perlow explains this on a kabbalistic level, we can understand it on a more basic level, as well, and say that the counting of the Omer, in effect, serves the purpose of fulfilling the mandate of observing two Shabbosos, which, as we have seen, is a condition for the redemption.

After describing the observance of Shavuot, the Torah tells us of the various festivals we are to observe in the seventh month of the year. These days include Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres. This entire period is actually one of introspection and repentance. The days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are known as the Ten Days of repentance, and some kabbalistic sources say that the final judgment is given on Shemini Atzeres. What is the reason for a second period of judgment? The Sefas Emes explains that the initial period is characterized by our fear of God, and the repentance at this time is a repentance that comes from fear of God - teshuvah mi - yirah. Once we have established a relationship with God on that level, we are given a further opportunity of repentance, ending with Shemini Atzeres. During this period, we try to achieve repentance grounded in love of God - teshuvah mei - ahavah.

The rabbis tell us that while teshuvah mi - yirah changes willful transgressions to inadvertent ones, teshuvah mei - ahavah transforms willful transgressions to good deeds. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zt'l, explained that we are able to convert our sins into good deeds by re-interpreting the events of our lives, understanding them as leading up to our current relationship with God. In effect, through this kind of repentance, we are re-interpreting the past, collapsing the distinction between past and present, and bringing the spirit of the festivals of the seventh month into the previous time period. Thus, the cycle of the festivals teaches us to infuse our entire lives, throughout the year, with an awareness of God. As we have seen, this is the message of Shabbos, as well, and its prescription therefore serves as a fitting preface to the mitzvos of the various festivals.

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