

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Ki Tisa
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פרשת כי תשא
כ' באדר תשע"ז

Torah Reading: *Shmot* (Exodus) 30:11-34:35

In this *parasha*, Hashem continues describing the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) to Moshe; the people worship the *Aygel Hazahav* (Golden Calf), Moshe pleads on their behalf, and Hashem forgives them.

This *parasha* contains one of the famous passages about the Shabbat, one which we recite in the Shabbat morning *kiddush*. Chapter 31, verses 12-17 reads:

יב ויאמר ה', אל-משה לאמר. יג ואתה דבר אל-בני ישראל, לאמר, אדן את-שבתתי, תשמרו: כי אות היא ביני וביניכם, לדורתכם--לדעת, כי אני ה' מקדשכם. יד ושמרתם, את-השבת, כי קדש היא, לכם; מחלליה, מות יומת--כי כל-העשה בה מלאכה, ונכרתה הנפש ההיא מקרב עמיה. טו ששת ימים, יעשה מלאכה, וביום השביעי שבת שבתון קדש, ה'; כל-העשה מלאכה ביום השבת, מות יומת. טז ושמרו בני-ישראל, את-השבת, לעשות את-השבת לדורתם, ברית עולם. יז ביני, ובין בני ישראל-אות היא, לעלם: כי-ששת ימים, עשה ה' את-השמים ואת-הארץ, וביום השביעי, שבת וינפש.

12 And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: **13** 'Speak also to the children of Yisrael, saying: Surely you shall keep My sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am Hashem who sanctify you. **14** You shall keep the sabbath therefore, for it is holy to you; every one that profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whosoever does any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among the people. **15** Six days shall work be done; but on the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to Hashem; whosoever does any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. **16** Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to

observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. **17** It is a sign between Me and the children of Yisrael for ever; for in six days Hashem made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day Hashem ceased from work and rested.'

The commentators ask why this section is here in the middle of particulars related to building the *Mishkan*. Further, the words come across as harsh: anyone who profanes the Shabbat shall surely be put to death!?!

One answer to these questions may be found in the dichotomy between space and time. The *Mishkan* is, beyond doubt, a holy place. It is the place where the people will go to worship Hashem; it is the place about which Hashem says, "I will dwell among them." It will serve as the central sanctuary for the Jewish people for nearly 500 years until the building of the *Beit HaMikdash*, the Temple, in Yerushalayim.

Holiness in space represents a relatively easy concept for us. We know that we behave in the synagogue differently from the way we behave in a sports arena. We dress differently, we use a different volume of voice, and we talk about different things. There is a sense of holiness intrinsic to a synagogue that is absent in a sports arena. We also know where to find the synagogue and where to find the arena; they don't move.

Holiness in time stands as a more complex concept, yet it too exists in our world. Any idea involving time is hard to wrap our minds around. Time doesn't stand still. You are reading a paper which existed before you read these words and will exist afterwards (unless you are reading it electronically, in which case the monitor exists before and after you read it.) But the second in which you read this sentence is fleeting; oops, it's already gone.

According to the Torah, Shabbat, the seventh day, is a holy day. Some rabbis suggest that holiness in time takes priority over holiness in space because it is more difficult to understand, as well as because it is always moving. Therefore, all work on the *Mishkan* ceased on Shabbat. That is why the prohibition to work on Shabbat is repeated here.

This may also explain the severe penalty stated for desecration of the Shabbat. The Torah perhaps wants to make it clear that, although we may not understand holiness in time, we are bidden to take note of it and rise to the occasion of commemorating it. The seemingly extreme penalty forces us to take special notice

of the concept of holiness in time, which we might otherwise undervalue or disregard.

Hopefully, all Jewish families have some way in which they commemorate the Shabbat. Whether by lighting candles, having a family meal, or doing something special and out of the ordinary, we can all recognize that sacred period each week that we call Shabbat and keep it as “a sign between Me and the children of Yisrael forever.”

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- How does your family recognize and/or celebrate Shabbat?
- What are some other ways that families might commemorate Shabbat?
- Shabbat, as Jews celebrate it, is unique to Jewish life. Why do you think we Jews have a special holy day set aside just for us?