

Parashat Emor 5776, 2016:

The Relationship Between Shabbat and the Festivals

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yeziel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

One of the most unusual textual juxtapositions in our *parasha* occurs at the onset of the Torah's discussion of the *Mo'adim* (the Festivals, *Sefer Vayikra*, chapter 23). The first two verses state:

And the L-rd spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: '[These are] the L-rd's appointed [holy days] that you shall designate as holy occasions. These are My appointed [holy days].'" (These and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Since the Jewish people are commanded to designate certain specific days as holy occasions (*mikra'ei kodesh*), one would naturally expect the following verse to speak about one of the festivals, such as Passover or Succot. The very next *pasuk* (verse), however, focuses upon Shabbat: "[For] six days, work may be performed, but on the seventh day, it is a complete rest day, a holy occasion; you shall not perform any work. It is a Sabbath to the L-rd in all your dwelling places." On the surface, this *pasuk* certainly seems to be out of place. After all, G-d, not man, sanctifies Shabbat, as we find in a very famous passage in Parashat Bereishit:

Now the heavens and the earth were completed and all their host. And G-d completed on the seventh day His work that He did, and He abstained on the seventh day from all His work that He did. And G-d blessed the seventh day and He hallowed it, for thereon He abstained from all His work that G-d created to do. (2:1-3, underlining my own)

Not too surprisingly, a number of Torah commentators have addressed this exegetical problem. Rashi (1040-1105), based upon the *Sifra*, the halachic Midrash to *Sefer Vayikra*, explains the placement of Shabbat at the beginning of the presentation of the *Mo'adim* in the following fashion:

Why does the Sabbath [designated by G-d,] appear here amidst the festivals? To teach you that whoever desecrates the festivals is considered [to have transgressed as severely] as if he had desecrated the Sabbath, and that whoever fulfills the festivals is considered as if he has fulfilled the Sabbath, [and his

reward is as great].

In sum, Rashi presents the classic opinion that, in some very significant ways, the *Mo'adim* are equivalent to Shabbat, even though it is man, rather than G-d, who designates the actual calendrical dates of the *mikra'ei kodesh*.

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky *zatzal* (1891-1986) takes a different approach than that of Rashi in his response to “Why does the Sabbath appear amidst the festivals?” His answer is at one and the same time sociological and spiritual in nature:

It appears to me that all nations and ethnicities have their different festivals and appointed times. Given that this is the case, in order to prevent us from erring and thinking that our festivals are no different in kind or degree from those of the other nations of the world, the Torah begins with the notion that without the Shabbat there would be no importance whatsoever to the *Mo'adim*. The reason for this is eminently clear – for without the declaration of the holiness of Shabbat [by Hashem], no holiness would inhere in the *Mo'adim*. (*Emet l'Yaakov*, Parashat Emor 23:2, translation and brackets my own)

Thus, for Rav Kamenetsky, the holiness of Shabbat imbues the *Mo'adim* with their singular status and holiness. True, the Jewish people declare the dates for the onset of the *mikra'ei kodesh*; yet, their *kedushah* (holiness) ultimately derives from the Shabbat itself.

Rabbi Nissan Alpert *zatzal* (1928-1986) was one of the great *roshei yeshivah* of Yeshivat Rabbi Yitzhak Elhanan and one of the greatest students of Rav Moshe Feinstein *zatzal* (1895-1986). In his posthumously published work of Torah analysis entitled *Limudei Nissan*, Rav Alpert presented an independent examination of Shabbat's connection to the *Mo'adim* that at once parallels and expands upon Rav Kamenetsky's conceptualization:

[The reason why Shabbat appears in the midst of the festivals] is to emphasize that it is the **mother** of all the *Mo'adim*, and the holiness of these [appointed] times flows from Shabbat. By way of explanation, this means that it is possible to extend the holiness of Shabbat to the other *Mo'adim*. It is as if Hashem said, “I have sanctified the Shabbat, now, I give you [the Jewish people] the power and the permission to consecrate the rest of the appointed times.” Moreover, just as it is the purpose of the Shabbat to cease from the creative activities of the workweek through complete and total [spiritual] relaxation in order to draw near to Hashem, so, too, this should be our orientation on the other *yamim tovim*. In other words, our actions and behaviors on these days should be aimed at strengthening our faith and trust in Hashem. (Parashat Emor, page 50, s.v. *v'nireh li*, translation and brackets my own)

Let us briefly review the far-reaching themes in Rav Alpert's compelling answer to our question:

1. Shabbat appears in the midst of the festivals because it is the "mother" of the *Mo'adim*.
2. The holiness of the *mikra'ei kodesh* flows directly from Shabbat.
3. Just as Hashem consecrates the Shabbat, we, too, are given the power and permission to sanctify the festivals.
4. The purpose of the *Mo'adim* is similar in kind to that of Shabbat, namely, we should utilize the holy moments of both the Shabbat and the festivals to strengthen our faith and trust in the Master of the Universe.

With Hashem's never-ending beneficence, may we be *zocheh* (merit) to draw closer to Him each and every Shabbat and Yom Tov as we rededicate ourselves to the holy task of strengthening our faith and trust in Him. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on YUTorah.org using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on "*Tefilah: Haskafah and Analysis*," may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.