

Parashat Emor 5779, 2019:

Shabbat and the Moadim

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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 Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Mordechai ben Miriam Tovah, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

One of the most prominent segments of our *parasha* is known as *Parashat HaMoadim* (Section of the Festivals). Its 44 *pasukim* (verses) comprise the 23rd chapter of *Sefer Vayikra* and serve as an encyclopedic presentation of the biblically-based *Moadim* (Festivals). It begins exactly as we would expect: “And the L-rd spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: The L-rd's appointed [holy days] that you shall designate as holy occasions. These are My appointed [holy days]’” (23:1-2, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) Following the words, “these are my appointed [holy days],” we would naturally anticipate a listing and exposition of the *Moadim* — beginning with Pesach and concluding with Succot. Yet, the next verse almost inexplicably refers to 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.” (23:3) This, in turn, is followed by the introduction to the Festivals that we originally expected: “These are the L-rd's appointed [holy days], holy occasions, which you [i.e. the Sanhedrin] shall designate in their appointed time.” (23:4)

Rashi, based upon several Midrashic passages, notes the anomalous nature of the inclusion of Shabbat in the midst of the *Moadim* and asks: “Why does the Sabbath [designated by G-d,] appear

here amidst the Festivals [designated by man, the Sanhedrin?]" (23:3) His answer is a classic example of Rabbinic analysis: "To teach you that whoever desecrates the Festivals is considered [to have transgressed as severely] as if he has desecrated the Sabbath, and that whoever fulfills the Festivals is considered as if he has fulfilled the Sabbath [and his reward is as great]." As such, in Rashi's view, the placement of Shabbat at the outset of our chapter is meant to convey the singular import of the *Moadim* by noting their close equivalence to Shabbat.

Rabbi Nissan Alpert *zatzal* (1928-1986) was one of the great *roshei yeshivah* of Yeshivat Rabbi Yitzhak Elhanan, and perhaps the most celebrated student of Rav Moshe Feinstein *zatzal* (1895-1986). In his posthumous work of Torah analysis entitled *Limudei Nissan*, Rav Alpert presents a deep insight regarding the connection between Shabbat and the *Moadim* that informs our understanding of Rashi's gloss:

[The reason why Shabbat appears before the festivals] is to emphasize that it is the mother of all the *Moadim*, 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 *Moadim*. 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 *Moadim*. 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)

Rav Alpert teaches us four important lessons regarding the special connection that obtains between Shabbat and the *Moadim*:

1. Shabbat is stated before the festivals because it is the "mother" of the *Moadim*.
2. The holiness of the *Moadim* extends directly from the holiness of Shabbat.
3. Just as Hashem consecrates the Shabbat, the Jewish people are given the power and permission to sanctify the festivals.
4. The purpose of the *Moadim* 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.

A parallel approach toward solving our problem was offered by the leading 14th century Talmudist and *posek* (halachic decisor), Rabbi Yaakov ben Moshe Levi Moelin, known as the Maharil (1365-1427). He offers a beautiful kabbalistically-infused explanation as to why Shabbat precedes the Torah's discussion of the *Moadim*:

We find in the *Zohar* (Emor 95:1): "Shabbat is called "*kodesh*" ("holy") but not "*mikra kodesh*" ("holy occasion"). *Yom Tov* (a festival day), however, is called a *mikra kodesh* [by the Torah]." [Yet,] there is a contradiction here! It states in Parashat Emor: "[For] six days, work may be performed, but on the seventh day, it is a complete rest day, a holy occasion (*mikra kodesh*); you shall not perform any work. It is a Sabbath to the L-rd in all your dwelling places" — Shabbat is also called a "*mikra kodesh*!" This seeming contradiction, however, can be explained in the manner that we have already written: *Yom Tov* receives [*kedushah*, holiness] from Shabbat. This means that within Shabbat there is an aspect of *Yom Tov* to enable Shabbat's [*kedushah*] to positively flow into *Yom Tov*... Now we understand why Shabbat is called "*mikra kodesh*" — in order to allow Shabbat's [*kedushah*] to flow into and affect the Festivals. (*Likutei Maharil, Sefer Devarim, Parashat Vayelech*, s.v. *v'nireh li*, translation and brackets my own)

In my estimation, the Maharil's answer to our question is the most spiritually edifying of all. He teaches us that the *Yom Tovim*, though consecrated by man, are nonetheless infused by *kedushat Shabbat* (the holiness of Shabbat). Therefore, each festival day has the potential to draw us closer to our Creator so that we may experience the sanctity of Shabbat on yet another level. With Hashem's help, may we be *zocheh* (merit) to feel G-d's presence every Shabbat, every *Yom Tov*, and every day of our lives. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria 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 the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:
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*** 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.