

Parashat Vaetchanan 5775, 2015

Shamor, Zachor and Torat Emet

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 Yechiel, 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, 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.

Remember (*Zachor*) the Sabbath day to sanctify it. (*Sefer Shemot* 20:8)
Keep (*Shamor*) the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the L-rd your G-d commanded you. (*Sefer Devarim* 5:12, these and all Bible and Rashi translation, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

The *Aseret Hadibrot* (Ten Commandments) are stated twice in the Torah. The first instance is in *Sefer Shemot, Parashat Yitro*, and the second is in our *parasha*. While there are a number of relatively minor differences between these formulations, there is one textually substantive disparity that has been the focal point of countless analyses by our Sages, namely, the verses referring to Shabbat. As cited above, our Torah portion states, “Keep (*Shamor*) the Sabbath day to sanctify it...” whereas the verse in *Sefer Shemot* reads, “Remember (*Zachor*) the Sabbath day to sanctify it.” This raises an obvious question. If our *parasha*’s statement of the *Aseret Hadibrot* is supposed to be a recapitulation of that which initially appeared in *Sefer Shemot*, how is it possible to have such radically divergent Shabbat-based texts? In other words, how can both texts be accurate and authentic if they entail two very different commandments and outcomes?

One of the earliest sources to address our question is the *Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai* on *Sefer Shemot* (20:8). According to scholarly consensus, this work is from the school of Rabbi Akiba (executed in 135 CE):

[The words,] *zachor* and *shamor* were said [simultaneously] regarding the same matter [i.e. Shabbat] – something that is impossible for the mouth to pronounce or for the ear to hear. Therefore the text states, “G-d spoke all these words...” (*Sefer Shemot* 20:1) and in addition, “G-d spoke one thing, I heard two...” (*Sefer Tehillim* 62:12, brackets my own)

This approach focuses upon the miraculous nature of Hashem’s single utterance that was comprised of two separate and distinct words, namely, “*shamor*” and “*zachor*.” It has been repeated multiple times throughout Rabbinic literature, in the *Midrashim* and the *Talmud Yerushalmi* and *Bavli*. Little wonder, then, that Rashi (1040-1105) utilized it twice in his glosses on our two initial verses:

Remember: Heb. זָכוֹר [The words] “remember (זָכוֹר)” and “keep (שָׁמֹר)” (*Sefer Devarim* 5:12) were pronounced with one utterance... This [occurrence of G-d saying two phrases simultaneously in one utterance] is the meaning of what is said: “G-d spoke one thing, I heard two” (*Sefer Tehillim* 62:12)

Keep [the Sabbath day]: But in the first set [of Ten Commandments] (in *Sefer Shemot* 20) it says: “Remember [the Sabbath day]!” The explanation is: Both of them (“Remember” and “Keep”) were spoken simultaneously as one word and were heard simultaneously.

500 years later, the *Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai*'s interpretation became permanently imprinted in the Jewish psyche through “*Lecha Dodi*,” the universally recited liturgical poem of the renowned 16th century Kabbalist, Rabbi Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz of Safed, Israel: “Keep” and “Remember” – in a single utterance the One and Only G-d made us hear.” (Translation, *Artscroll Hebrew/English Siddur*, page 317, with my emendations)

Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar (1696-1743), known as the “Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh (the holy one)” after the name of his famous work of Torah exegesis, offers a strikingly unique,

and even radical, interpretation as to why the Torah utilized the terms “*zachor*” and “*shamor*.” In fact, his approach is so iconoclastic that it would probably be labeled heretical by the standards of our time:

It is possible that in reality Hashem only stated “*zachor*” [and never actually said “*shamor*” in Parashat Vaetchanan]. [If this is the case, however,] one term [namely, “*shamor*,”] may be derived from its cognate term [i.e. “*zachor*”] for those who have deep and abiding understanding [of the Torah]. As a result of Hashem having stated “*zachor*,” we should have the intention that it should be understood (literally, “remembered”) in such a manner as to enable ourselves to apply our total cognitive abilities (literally, “knowledge”) regarding the term in order to avoid any capricious understanding. The resultant outcome you will then be able to achieve (literally “learn”) is that Hashem also commanded that which is found afterwards [i.e. “*shamor*” **within** the word “*zachor*” that was actually stated]. This, then, was Moshe’s explanation regarding when he said “*shamor*,” namely, that it is included in the word “*zachor*.” Note: All that I have written is written purely on the theoretical level (*b’derech efshar*). (*Sefer Ohr HaChaim on Sefer Devarim 5:12*, translation, underlining, bolding, brackets and parentheses my own)

Allow me to explicate the two main points of the Ohr HaChaim’s avowedly theoretical interpretation:

1. It is possible that Hashem never actually said, “*shamor*.” Instead, it is to be understood as an extension of “*zachor*,” even though it remains a *mitzvah* in its own right.
2. Moshe said the word “*shamor*,” as found in our *parasha*, to teach us that it is incorporated in “*zachor*.”

In my estimation, the Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh did not just teach a lesson regarding hypothetical *parshanut* (Torah analysis); instead, he bravely pushed the accepted boundaries of conventional wisdom in his relentless search for *Torat emet* (the truth of the Torah). In doing so, he embodied the oft-quoted and well-known words of *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed memory), “*Shivim panim l’Torah*” (there are 70 different ways to analyze the Torah).

With Hashem's help, may we also pursue *Torat emet*, and ever grow in our love and understanding of His holy Torah. Moreover, may each of us be *zocheh* (merit) to fulfill the sacred words of the second *bracha* (blessing) of the daily *Birchot HaTorah* (Torah blessings):

Please, Hashem, our G-d, sweeten the words of Your Torah in our mouth and in the mouth of Your people, the family of Israel. May we and our offspring and the offspring of Your people, the House of Israel – all of us – know Your Name and study Your Torah for its own sake. (Translation, *Artscroll Hebrew/English Siddur*, page 17)

V'chane yihi ratzon.

Shabbat Shalom

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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 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. They are available here: <http://tinyurl.com/82pgvfn>.

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