

JUDAISM 101

by Rabbi Dovid Green

"I believe with complete faith that The Creator, blessed is His name, creates and guides all creatures, and that He alone made, makes, and will make everything." (Morning Liturgy, based on the Thirteen Principles of Maimonides).

In this week's parsha the Torah discusses the entire cycle of the Jewish Holidays. First of all is the Sabbath. "Special times of G-d which you shall celebrate...seven days you may do work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of Sabbaths etc. (Leviticus 23:2-3). Then the Torah discusses Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, and Succot.

The Yalkut Lekach Tov quotes Rashi and shares with us an important explanation based on it. "What does Shabbos have to do with the Festivals? (Why is it mentioned together with the Festivals?) It is to teach us (the nature of their relationship) that anyone who desecrates the festivals is as if he has desecrated Shabbos. Conversely, anyone who observes the festivals it is as if he has observed Shabbos.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein explains that Shabbos and the festivals represent two basic beliefs which go hand in hand. Shabbos fills its observers with faith in the Creation of the world by G-d. Observance of Shabbos is based on the belief that G-d created the world in six days, and rested on the seventh. When we observe the Shabbos it reinforces in us this belief.

The Festivals, on the other hand, remind us that G-d runs the world. He brought the ten plagues and split the Sea of Reeds. G-d surrounded the Children of Israel with His divine protection and sustenance in their forty-year stay in the wilderness. Not only did G-d create the world, but He is constantly behind the scenes with His divine providence.

With the understanding of the message of Shabbos and the Festivals we can now understand the aforementioned statement of Rashi. Rashi is teaching us that both of these perspectives necessarily go hand in hand. They are inseparable. Observance of the Festivals, in addition to our stating that we believe that G-d runs the world, is an affirmation that G-d also created the world. Neither is independent of the other. This is Judaism 101. It is the basis of all religious observance.

We manifest our beliefs with our actions. At the same time, our actions influence our attitudes. Shabbos and Festival observance should not just be a good reason to get the family together, eat chicken soup, and discuss politics. It is a window into the soul of the people who observe them, and it sustains and refreshes our commitment to the essential knowledge of G-d's relationship with us.

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Good Shabbos!

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