

TWO TYPES OF SHABBAT

by Shlomo Katz

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Today's Learning:

Temurah 4:3-4

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Shevuot 29

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Pesachim 56

In this week's parashah, we read of the sin of the Golden Calf, of Hashem's plan to destroy Bnei Yisrael, and of Moshe Rabbeinu's prayers that saved them. Hashem offered to make Moshe's descendants into a great nation in place of Bnei Yisrael, but Moshe refused. The Midrash says, "Because Moshe said (32:32), '[And now, if You would but forgive their sin -] and if not, erase me now from Your book that You have written,' Moshe earned that Hashem would answer his prayers when Korach rebelled." R' Avraham Bornstein z"l (1839-1910; the Sochatchover Rebbe and author of several important halachic works) explained:

How could Moshe pray for the death of Korach? No doubt, Korach deserved to die, for by challenging Moshe's leadership, he effectively challenged the legitimacy of the Torah that Moshe gave! Yet, his attack on Moshe was very personal. How could Moshe be certain that his own motives in praying for Korach's death were pure? After all, one who prays for harm to come to another Jew risks losing his own life in This World and the World- to-Come!

In answer, R' Bornstein cited the teaching of the Arizal (R' Yitzchak Luria z"l; 1534-1572) that Moshe did not become the great person that he was in one day. Like everyone else, he underwent a growth process. The crowning moment in that process was when he made the statement, "If not, erase me now from Your book that You have written." As the Gemara paraphrases it, Moshe said: "Let one thousand 'Moshes' be lost, but let not one fingernail of the Jewish people be harmed." At that moment, when Moshe demonstrated his willingness to give up both worlds for the sake of the Jewish people, he demonstrated the complete negation of self that made it possible for him to pray for Korach's demise later. (Quoted in Otzrot Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot)

"The wealthy shall not increase and the destitute shall not decrease from half a shekel." (30:15)

R' Shlomo Yosef Zevin z"l (see page 4) writes: It is now common in many countries to tax "progressively," meaning that not only do the wealthy pay more taxes because they have a bigger taxable base (e.g., higher incomes), they also pay at a higher rate. This is not a new idea, writes R' Zevin. It is found in the Mishnah (Peah 1:2): "One should give not less than 1/60 of his field as peah [i.e, leaving part of the field unharvested so the poor can come and take for themselves]." The mishnah continues: "Although [according to Torah law] there is no minimum level of peah, it all depends on the size of the field." Commentaries ask: What is the meaning of the last phrase, "it all depends on the size of the field"? Of course, the larger the field, the more peah one will give! The answer is that the mishnah is describing a progressive tax system. According to Torah law, there is no minimum amount that a person must give as peah. However, the Sages decreed a minimum - 1/60 of the field. Nevertheless, it all depends on the size of the field, and one who has a larger field should give at a higher rate than 1/60.

On the other hand, the Torah also imposes flat taxes, which require everyone to pay the same thing. Our verse is an example of a flat tax. Why? So that no person would think that the Mishkan / Tabernacle or Bet Hamikdash / Temple belonged to him more than to his poorer neighbor. Indeed, it was for this reason that each person gave half a shekel, to remind him that he made only part of the contribution.

In this light we can better understand the Gemara's teaching (Megillah 13b) that the merit of the mitzvah of the half-shekel outweighed the 10,000 shekels that Haman offered Achashveirosh. What this really means is that Jewish unity saved the Jewish people in the days of Haman. This is what Esther had in mind when she told Mordechai (Esther 4:16), "Go, gather all the Jews." And, the Jews were successful in battle against Haman's allies because (Esther 9:16) they "congregated and defended themselves." (La'Torah Ve'la'moadim p.118)

"He [Moshe] said, 'Show me Your glory'. He [G-d] said, 'I shall make all My goodness pass before you, and I shall call out with the Name Hashem before you; I shall show favor when I choose to show favor,

and I shall show mercy when I choose to show mercy'." (33:18-19)

R' Yechiel Michel Halevi Epstein z"l (1829-1907; see page 4) explains these verses as follows: Moshe's request was to be able to reach the highest possible level in his grasp of the Torah so that he could then attain the ultimate love for Hashem. Hashem answered him that He would reveal His "goodness" - an allusion to Torah, which is called "good" - and would teach him His Name - another reference to Torah, which kabbalists say is entirely made up of different Names of G-d.

Moshe was then concerned: How will other Jews ever attain such an understanding of the Torah? Hashem answered him: "I shall show favor when I choose to show favor." The Hebrew root "chen" (translated here as "favor") connotes something undeserved ("chinam"). Hashem assured Moshe, "I will teach the Torah even to the undeserving." G-d also promises in our verse to act mercifully, and it is based on this that we pray every morning (in the blessing before Shma): "The merciful Father, Who acts mercifully, have mercy on us, instill in our hearts to understand and elucidate, to listen, learn, teach . . ." [Without this explanation, it is difficult to understand the repeated references to G-d's mercy in this prayer, which primarily asks G-d to help us study Torah.] (Derashot Kol Ben Levi No. 15)

Shabbat

"You shall observe the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. . . For six days, work may be done. . ." (From our parashah - 31:14-15)

R' Meir Simcha Hakohen z"l (1843-1926; rabbi of Dvinsk, Latvia; author of Ohr Sameach) notes that the prohibition on working on Shabbat is mentioned several times in the Torah. In some verses (for example Shmot 20:9), the Torah uses the active voice, "Six days shall you work." In other verses, the Torah uses the passive voice, as in the above verse from our parashah. The passive voice also is used in next week's parashah (35:2): "On six days, work may be done." Why?

He answers: In the sections in which the Torah uses the passive voice, the Torah also refers to the holiness of Shabbat. For example, our parashah says, "You shall observe the Sabbath, _for_it_is_holy_to_you_. . . For six days, work may be done." Similarly, we read in next week's parashah, "On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day _shall_be_holy_for_you_." In contrast, the verses that use the active voice do not refer to the holiness of Shabbat.

What does this teach? R' Meir Simcha explains: Our Sages teach, "When you do the Will of Hashem, your work will be done by others. When you do not do the Will of Hashem, you will have to do your own work." If we infuse the Shabbat with holiness, that holiness will rub-off on us, helping us do the Will of Hashem all week long. Then our work will be done passively, i.e., by others. However, when our Shabbat is not infused with holiness, then we will have to do our own work actively. (Meshech Chochmah)

"R' Chagai says in the name of R' Shmuel bar Nachman, 'Shabbat and Yom Tov were given only for

eating and drinking. Only because the mouth [that does nothing but eat and drink] gives off an odor is one permitted to learn Torah [also]. R' Berachiah says in the name of R' Chiya bar Abba, 'Shabbat and Yom Tov were given only for studying Torah.'" (Talmud Yerushalmi: Shabbat Ch. 15)

R' Eliyahu Hakohen Itamari z"l (Izmir, Turkey; died 1729) writes that Rabbi Chagai and Rabbi Berachiah are not arguing. Rather, they are addressing different situations. In fact, this teaching of the Talmud Yerushalmi may be the source for the following halachah found in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 290:2):

"After the morning meal on Shabbat, we set aside time to study the Prophets and to teach Midrash, and one is forbidden to schedule a meal at that time. The workers and businessmen who do not occupy themselves with Torah study all week long must devote more time on Shabbat to Torah study than do the scholars who study all week long. Torah scholars, on the other hand, should engage in pleasurable activities and should eat and drink on Shabbat, for they learn all week long." [Ed. note: The foregoing is a free translation from the Shulchan Aruch. Those who are able are encouraged to examine the precise wording, as several significant lessons may be found there.] (Aggadot Eliyahu)

R' Shlomo Yosef Zevin z"l

R' Shlomo Yosef Zevin was born in 1888 in Kazimirov (near Minsk), where his father, R' Aharon Mordechai, was the rabbi. The younger R' Zevin's education was a combination of both "Litvishe" (Lithuanian) and chassidic influences; he studied first in the yeshiva of Mir under R' Eliyahu Baruch Kamai and then in Bobruisk under R' Shemaryahu Noach Schneerson. (R' Schneerson was the leader of an offshoot of the Chabad movement based in Kopust.) R' Zevin was ordained by R' Schneerson, R' Yosef Rosen (the Rogatchover Gaon) and R' Yechiel Michel Epstein (author of Aruch Hashulchan).

At the age of 18, R' Zevin began corresponding with leading sages. He also began at a young age to serve Russian Jewry in various communal capacities. During the brief period of Ukrainian independence after World War I, R' Zevin served as a member of the Ukrainian parliament. He also served as a member and officer of the parent body of Jewish communities in Ukraine. He served as rabbi of several communities, including his birthplace. Beginning in 1921, he edited a Torah journal Yagdil Torah together with R' Yechezkel Abramsky of Slutsk.

In 1934, R' Zevin settled in Eretz Yisrael and began teaching at the Mizrahi-affiliated Bet Midrash L'morim. He also served as a member of the Chief Rabbinate Council. However, he became best known for his written works, including:

L'Ohr Ha'halachah - essays on both practical and abstract halachic topics, including a halachic analysis of the legal and moral questions presented in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice;

Ha'moadim Be'halachah - halachic studies of the Jewish festivals;

Ishim Ve'shitot - biographies of selected 19th and 20th century sages with analyses of their individual methods of study;

La'Torah Ve'la'moadim - essays on the Torah and the festivals (see the excerpt on page 2); and

Sippurei Chassidim - chassidic tales arranged by parashah and festival.

Several of these works of been adapted into English by Artscroll.

For the last 35 years of his life, R' Zevin served as editor of the Encyclopedia Talmudit. He died on 21 Adar I 5738 / 1978.

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