

ONLY THE RABBI WORKS ON SHABBOS

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"Remember the Sabbath, to sanctify it." [20:8]

Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, quotes the Talmud Shavuos [20b]: "'Remember' [as above] and 'guard' [the Sabbath to sanctify it..., Dev. 5:12] were said in one statement." According to the Talmud, G-d said both commandments in the same instant - one of very few such instances found in the Torah.

The Leket Bahir notes that there are many places in Devarim [Deuteronomy], aptly called "Mishnah Torah" or "review of Torah," where the Torah repeats that which was said earlier, and changes or adds to the previous version. Indeed, there are several other changes within the "10 commandments" themselves. So why in only a few cases, such as this one, did our Sages explain that both verses were said together?

The answer is that as we all know, not everything which is said is written down - and in those other cases, our teacher Moshe provided further detail in his "review" in Devarim. But "remember" and "guard" are contradictory statements: "remember" is a positive commandment, to perform 'rememberances' and thus sanctify the Sabbath, whereas "guard" is a negative commandment, to withhold oneself from actions which would disturb the sanctity of Shabbos, and thus sanctify the day. Therefore one cannot say that the latter version merely adds on to what was said previously, because if there was really only one statement, then the "sanctification" could only come about through one means.

There must be, then, two commandments, so the sanctification comes about through both "remembering" and "guarding" the day. Just as the positive commandment is designed to recall G-d's dominance over all Creation and our special connection to Him, so too the negative is supposed to facilitate this recognition.

Someone once asked me why everyone else takes a break from their jobs on Shabbos - but the Rabbi just gets busier! He delivers a sermon, gives classes, and certainly doesn't stop his Torah learning for the day. And on the other hand, someone also asked me why, if someone's idea of rest and relaxation is driving down to the beach, that isn't an appropriate Shabbos activity.

Both of these questions stem from the same misunderstanding, and it has less to do with the

definition of "rest" than the definition of "work." The Torah doesn't say that "avodah," or "work," is forbidden, but rather "melachah," or "creative labor." Any activity which is physically (rather than mentally) creative is forbidden, including cooking, sewing, planting, building, and 35 other basic categories (all of which were part of building the Tabernacle).

Taking a vacation, or a day at the beach, is indeed the opposite of working at a job, but Shabbos is the opposite of all physically creative activity. The intent is to force us to step back from our own efforts to mold the world, in order to recognize He who is ultimately in charge. In other words, the goal of our physical rest is not inactivity, but - to the contrary - spiritual activity and growth! This is how the negative commandment ultimately works together with the positive, in order to bring us to the same spiritual goal.

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