

THEY GO TOGETHER

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The repetition of the aseret hadvarim - the Ten Commandments - is one of the highlights of this week's parsha. Why does Moshe feel impelled to repeat the Decalogue? Some commentators are of the opinion that the repetition is in order to highlight the nuances of difference in the text of this version of the aseret hadvarim from the text that appears in parshat Yitro. Since both texts are from Sinai and were uttered, so to speak, simultaneously, something which is not possible to convey in writing, Moshe was impelled therefore to repeat the Decalogue in order to inform us of the differences in the text - differences that the Oral Law will explain and expand upon.

The repetition of the text emphasizes for us the basic principle of Judaism throughout the ages, that the Written Torah is not understandable nor truly instructive without the traditions and teachings of the Oral Law that accompany and elucidate it. The Torah purposely presents us with a different text to make us aware of the necessity of understanding and reconciling the texts according to the explanations of Sinai - the Oral Law. The discrepancies and apparent "mistakes" in the text are the keys to understanding the Torah through the study and appreciation of the Oral Law. This is an understanding of Torah that has somehow escaped all of the Bible critics and other "scientific" studies of the biblical text. It is the Oral Law that differentiates the Jewish bible from the Christian bible and from the biblical study courses of those who do not know nor appreciate that Oral Law.

The major difference between the texts that is most noticeable in its halachic conclusions refers to the commandment regarding the observance of Shabat. The text in Yitro reads zachor - remember the Shabat to keep it holy - while the text here in Vaetchanan reads shamor - guard, watch, observe the Shabat to keep it holy. Zachor indicates the positive, attractive side of Shabat. It is accomplished through delicious meals, Kiddush on wine, rest and sleep, companionship and hospitality. Shamor represents the more restrictive aspect of Shabat. It is the commandment that forbids thirty-nine types of "work" and circumscribes our activities on that holy day.

Over the long run of Jewish history many individuals and groups have attempted to retain the beauty of the zachor of Shabat while disregarding the seeming stringencies imposed by shamor. All such efforts and formulae have proven to be worthless and disastrous. In our time, the Shabat of Conservative Jews was not enhanced when they were allowed to drive their automobiles on Shabat, ostensibly only to synagogue services. The laity did not understand the difference between driving to the synagogue and driving to the golf course. And thus the long descent of Conservative synagogues into the pool of non-observance of Torah, intermarriage and loss of Jewish values

proved itself to be inexorable.

The rabbis taught us that shamor and zachor were uttered, so to speak, as one word, simultaneously. The Oral Law teaches us how that impossibility is truly the reality and the means of preservation of Shabat and of the Jewish people.

Shabat shalom.

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