

THE GREAT SHABAT

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The parsha of Tzav more often than not coincides with the Shabat preceding Pesach - Shabat Hagadol, the "great Shabat." At first glance there does not seem to be any inherent connection between the parsha of Tzav and Shabat Hagadol and Pesach. However, since Judaism little recognizes randomness or happenstance regarding Jewish life, and certainly regarding Torah itself, a further analysis of the parsha may reveal to us an underlying connection between Tzav and Pesach.

I feel that this underlying theme lies in the description that the parsha contains regarding the consecration of Aharon and his sons as the priests and servants of God and Israel. Judaism teaches us that freedom equals responsibility. Freedom without limits or purpose is destructive anarchy. The entire narrative of the Torah regarding the construction of the Mishkan and the institution of public worship/sacrifices came to emphasize to the freed slaves from Egypt their newfound responsibilities.

The rabbis cogently and correctly defined freedom in terms of obligations and study of Torah, as opposed to the alleged freedom of hedonism. The consecration of Aharon and his sons coinciding with the consecration and dedication of the Mishkan itself brought home to the Jewish people the requirement of community service and national unity.

Look at the freedom movements that have arisen in the Middle East over the past few years and the chaos and deaths of tens of thousands of people that followed in their wake. The inability to create unity, to develop a moral and tangible national goal mocks all pretenses of positive freedom. Without Aharon and the Mishkan the promise of the freedom of Pesach would have remained permanently unfulfilled.

Part of the lesson of the Great Shabat is that without Shabat, Jewish freedom is only an illusion. Shabat is truly the epitome of freedom. The absence of workday activities, the sense of family and friends, and of the contentment that Shabat engenders all combine to create a vision of true freedom that is attainable and real.

The Great Shabat that precedes Pesach gives it its true meaning and places the anniversary of our freedom from Egyptian bondage into holy perspective. Freedom to toil 24/7 is only a different form of slavery. When Saturday looks like Tuesday but only more so since school is out and the burdens of car pooling and "having a good time" are even greater, then that cannot even remotely be related

to true freedom.

In reality every Shabat is the Great Shabat and the Shabat preceding Pesach is even more so. Shabat Hagadol represents the miracle that blessed our forefathers in Egypt when they took the Paschal lamb and the Egyptians did not object. But the true and ultimate miracle of Shabat Hagadol is Shabat itself. It has preserved the Jewish people throughout the ages in the face of opposing innumerable odds and challenges. It is in the realization of our freedom that we are able to properly appreciate and give tribute to Shabat - Shabat Hagadol, the Great Shabat that we now commemorate so joyfully and gratefully.

Shabat shalom Pesach kasher v'sameach

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Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com