

THE PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATION OF CARRYING

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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The Philosophical Implication of the Labor of Carrying

In Parshas Vayakhel, the Torah once again tells us about the laws of Shabbos: "Six days you shall do work, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem..." [Shmos 35:2]

We know that there are 39 categories of prohibited work. These are learned from the labors that were needed in the Mishkan. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that the 39 forbidden categories of work represent man's mastery over the physical world. Therefore, if I rest on Shabbos, I am making the statement that there is a greater Master over this physical world than myself.

If by working six days, I proclaim my mastery over the physical world, then by resting on the seventh day, I am saying "but there is a greater Master over the physical world and that is G-d." Therefore, as our Sages tell us, keeping Shabbos is giving testimony that we believe in G-d's creation of the world.

This works well for 38 of the 39 categories of work. The one type of forbidden work which does not seem to fit in with this philosophical framework is the prohibition of carrying. Carrying does not show mastery over anything. The object remains the same as it was before, one has not shown mastery over anything by transporting an object. Carrying seems to be the exception to the rule.

The prophet Jeremiah seems to confirm this [Yirmiyahu 17:19-27] by repeatedly distinguishing between "performing labor" and "carrying burdens out of your houses" in bemoaning the lack of Shabbos observance in Jerusalem.

If the 38 labors represent man's mastery over the world, what is the philosophical implication of the labor of carrying?

Rav Hirsch says that 'Carrying' represents social interaction -- taking from the private domain into the community and taking from the community into the private domain. This is the social interaction of human beings.

The sum total of all human social interactions can be called 'history'. When I refrain from carrying on Shabbos, I am making the statement, that not only is G-d Master over the physical world, but G-d is Master over social interaction. G-d is Master over history.

This is what Yirmiyahu told the Jews of Jerusalem: "If you refrain from carrying..." (meaning you recognize G-d's mastery over history) "...then I will make My Divine Providence (Hashgocha Protis) felt and Jerusalem will have fame and glory; however if you refuse to listen to me and you do carry on Shabbos (meaning you refuse to acknowledge G-d's place in history) the result will be that I will remove myself from history and, Rachmana l'tzlan, Jerusalem will be destroyed".

This, says R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, is what we say in the Shabbos Kiddush. Shabbos is "in commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt" and it is "in commemoration of the Act of Creation". The Act of Creation is the fact that we acknowledge (by abstaining from 38 types of labor) that G-d created the physical world. The Exodus is the fact that we acknowledge (by refraining from carrying) the Hand of G-d in the history of human beings.

Mirrors Appropriate Component of Vessel Used to Sanctify Hands & Feet

Toward the end of the parsha, the verse reads [38:8] "He made the Laver of copper and its base of copper, from the mirrors of the legions (haTzov'os) who massed at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting." The Kior was the basin in which the Kohanim washed their hands and feet every day at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Moshe constructed the Kior from the 'mirrors of the legions.'

Rash"i here relates a fascinating tradition from the Sages as to the nature of these mirrors: The women of the Jewish people donated their copper mirrors to the building fund of the Tabernacle. Moshe was hesitant to accept this gift. He felt that the object that the women stood in front of to fix their hair and to put on their lipstick was, perhaps, not appropriate to use in the Mishkan. He was about to reject them because he considered them 'made for the evil inclination.'

G-d overruled Moshe. G-d said, "there is nothing more dear to Me than those mirrors; for with those mirrors the women were able to establish masses of legions in Egypt".

When the husbands were out slaving away at the pyramids, they had no drive, no ambition, and no hope for the future. The women went and beautified themselves for their husbands in front of these mirrors and engaged their husbands in relations. As a result of that, there were masses of the Jewish nation.

"Therefore," G-d said, "there is nothing more important to Me. Take those mirrors and make them part of the Kior."

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that it is particularly fitting and proper that they used these mirrors specifically for the Kior. The Kior was that vessel which was used to "sanctify their hands and

feet." On a symbolic level, the idea of sanctifying one's hands and feet means the sanctification of one's actions. A person has the ability to infuse with holiness that which his hands and feet produce.

The Catholic religion insists that the sensual side of a person is inherently bad. It is a product of the 'Original Sin.' The Torah says "No! This is not true."

There is no aspect of a human being that cannot be elevated, that cannot be infused with holiness. Eating can be for the sake of Heaven. Marital relations can be for the sake of Heaven. Everything can be holy. It depends what we make of it.

This is represented by the vessel which accomplishes "sanctification of hands and feet." It teaches that one can in fact make holy every single act of one's life -- one's work, one's play, one's eating, and one's marital life. Everything can be infused with holiness.

The mirrors of those women represented that beautiful moment in Jewish history when women made themselves attractive and enticed their husbands entirely for the sake of Heaven. It is the sensual side of human beings on the highest level. So, G-d said, take those mirrors and put them in the vessel which teaches for all generations that it is possible to infuse every and any part of one's life with a higher level of sanctity.

Glossary

Rachmana L'tzlan -- (Aramaic) May the All Merciful spare us.

Kior -- Laver used for washing hands and feet of Kohanim

sheitlach -- (Yiddish) wigs

Personalities & Sources:

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch -- (1808-1888) Rabbi in Frankfurt-am-Main; leader of modern German Jewish Orthodoxy. Authored six-volume commentary on Chumash.

Rash"i -- Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105); Torah commentator par excellence; France.

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