

SFAS EMES, YISRO 5632

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Sfas Emes, Zechuso Tagein Aleinu, Yisro 5632

The Sfas Emes begins this ma'amar with a quote from the Zohar:

"Shabbos sums up the entire Torah". The Sfas Emes bolsters this point by bringing a halachic ruling in support of this Zohar. If someone does not believe in Shabbos, halacha regards him as a person who does not believe in the entire Torah.

What does the Sfas Emes have in mind when he tells us that Shabbos sums up the whole Torah? I suggest that the Sfas Emes is directing our attention to a unique feature of Shabbos. Clearly, Shabbos brings to mind the fact that HaShem created the world of nature. (The Sfas Emes refers to the natural world by citing the Asara Ma'amaros -- the ten utterances with which HaShem created heaven and earth.). Likewise, Shabbos, with its rich content of hilchos Shabbos, also embodies and evokes the Torah (to which the Sfas Emes refers with the shorthand phrase of "Aseres Hadibros" -- the Ten Commandments). Thus, Shabbos highlights Torah and Creation coming together.

More importantly, as the Sfas Emes emphasizes, not only are these key topics juxtaposed; they are also interdependent. In the world of creation, Nature obeys the laws of science that HaShem established to govern its behavior. But Creation and the world of nature can exist only if we obey the laws that HaShem gave us to govern our behavior -- i.e., the Torah.

The Sfas Emes elaborates on this point by alluding to a comment in Gemara Shabbos (88a). The context there is Matan Torah. Chazal tell us that when HaShem offered us the the Torah, He said: "If Klal Yisroel accepts the Torah, Creation will exist.. But if Klal Yisroel do not accept the Torah, I (HaShem) will return the world to the state it was in before creation, -- i.e., to chaos".

The Sfas Emes continues with this line of thought; that it is only our acceptance of the Torah that renders the natural world -- i.e., the world without Torah -- liveable. (If you think he is exaggerating, look at a newspaper and see how a world looks when people no longer accept "Aseres Hadibros".)

In a final comment on the need for Torah to make the world of nature liveable, the Sfas Emes refers to another ma'amar of Chazal (Avodah Zara, 9a). The Gemara there tells us that HaShem arranged human history in a special sequence. First would come 2,000 years in which only Nature (Teva) was apparent. Chazal refer to that period as one in which the world was in a state of "tohu va'vohu" (R. Hirsch: 'confused and tangled.'). Only later was Torah introduced into the system, to clear away the

confusion and tangle of lives lived in a world of nature alone. By letting people know that all life comes from HaShem, the Torah made it possible for the world "le'hischadeish " -- to begin life anew.

The Sfas Emes moves on now to another line of thought. A posuk in Shir Hashirim (5: 6) says: "Nafshi ya'tzah bedabro imi." (That is, "My soul took leave of me when He spoke to me".) Chazal apply this posuk to our encounter with HaShem at Matan Torah, when He gave us the Torah.. As the Almighty proclaimed the first Dibra (Commandment), the experience was so awesome that our souls took leave of our bodies. That is, Bnei Yisroel expired. What restored life to our people? The Torah did. Thus, a posuk in Tehilim (19: 8) tells us that: "Toras HaShem temima, meshivas nafesh". (That is, "HaShem's Torah ... restores life".)

You may say: "A nice thought; but how did this process actually work -- in the real world? " How did the Torah revive our people? The Sfas Emes explains that the Torah has this restorative effect because the Torah is the vehicle through which HaShem chose to make His Presence manifest in the physical world. Thus, by adhering to the Torah we are connecting to HaShem. This is what the posuk means when it says that the Torah restored our souls. The Torah enabled us to re-establish our intertwined relationship with HaShem. Note the chiddush (innovation) that the Sfas Emes has introduced here. (I say "note" because the Sfas Emes does not tell us that he is construing the posuk in a radically new way.). The simple, conventional understanding of the phrase "meshivas nafesh" is: ["When our souls took leave of our bodies at Matan Torah"] the Torah returned our souls to our bodies.. However the Sfas Emes is reading "meshivas nafesh" as: "returned our nefashos to their previous close relation with HaShem".

Mention of the words "meSHiVas nefesh" leads the Sfas Emes to thoughts about SHaBBoS. The Sfas Emes reminds us that our soul has three parts: nefesh, ruach, and neshama.. Of these three, "nefesh" is the closest to our physical reality, and hence, easiest to engage and repair. In fact, a properly spent Shabbos can restore a person's nefesh.. Note, further, another connection between Shabbos and nefesh. The posuk in Shemos (31,17) tells us that on Shabbos the Almighty: "shavas. va'yiNaFaSH". R'. Hirsch translates this phrase as: "... (He) ceased to create on the seventh day and withdrew into His own essence". I suggest that "His own essence" is ruchniyus (spirituality). So, too, on Shabbos our nefashos can be raised, bringing us closer to HaShem.

Why? How? Because our expanded Avoda on Shabbos gives HaShem nachas ruach (joy). And HaShem's joy, in turn, gives our nefashos new life. Thus, HaShem's "Va'yinafash" on Shabbos has an impact on a person's nefesh. The Sfas Emes takes us even further. He emphasizes that closer contact with our source (HaShem) on Shabbos permits the vibrancy of Torah to reach the workaday world as well.

The possibility of reaching a higher state of ruchniyus on Shabbos should not be taken for granted; for it is truly a remarkable phenomenon. Accordingly, the Sfas Emes devotes more effort to explaining it . The Torah (Shemos, 20:11) tells us: "Va'yanach bayom hashevi'. Al kein beirach..." ("He

ceased to create on the seventh day.. For this reason, HaShem blessed the seventh day ..."). The Sfas Emes understands this pasuk as providing further explanation of the remarkable phenomenon just mentioned.. We can return to a closer relation with HaShem on Shabbos because HaShem invested Shabbos with a special beracha (blessing).

The Sfas Emes sees this beracha in the posuk just cited , specifically in the word "Va'yanach." Mainstream Hebrew grammar reads this verb as a construction in binyan kal.. That construction gives us "Va'yanach" as: "He rested (ceased to create) on the seventh day." By contrast, the Sfas Emes reads "Va'yanach" as formed in hif'il -- the causative construction. This gives us: He caused (enabled) to rest. The Sfas Emes's non-pshat reading of "Va'yanach" permits him to show us two special dimensions of the beracha that HaShem has given us with Shabbos. One is: a feature that we have already noted. That is: HaShem has granted us the possibility of achieving menucha (repose) to come closer to Him on Shabbos. The second beracha that the Sfas Emes shows us may come as more of a surprise, He says: "Va'yanach ... nitan zeh ha'ko'ach le'ham'shich m'imekor ha'berachos le'chol ha'olam". That is: HaShem has given us the capability to extend this blessing to the entire world.

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