



COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Family Edition

אמור תשע"ט
Emor 5779

Three Versions of Shabbat

WELCOME TO COVENANT & CONVERSATION 5779 FAMILY EDITION

Covenant & Conversation: Family Edition is a new and exciting initiative from *The Office of Rabbi Sacks* for 5779. Written as an accompaniment to Rabbi Sacks' weekly *Covenant & Conversation* essay, the Family Edition is aimed at connecting teenagers and families with his ideas and thoughts on the parsha. To receive this via email please make sure you are subscribed to Rabbi Sacks' main mailing list at www.RabbiSacks.org/Subscribe.



PARSHAT EMOR IN A NUTSHELL

Parshat Emor deals with two kinds of holiness: that of people and of time. Chapter 21 relates to holy people: Priests, and above them, the High Priest. Their close contact with the Sanctuary means that they must live with certain restrictions: on contact with the dead and whom they may marry. Chapter 22 recaps similar laws relating to ordinary

Israelites when they seek to enter the Sanctuary, as well as imperfections in animals that mean they cannot be offered as sacrifices. Chapter 23 is about holy time, the festivals of the year. Chapter 24 speaks about the Menorah, lit daily, and the show bread, renewed weekly, and ends with a story – one of the only two stories in the book of Vayikra – about a man who blasphemed in the course of a fight.



THE CORE IDEA

There is something unique about the way parshat Emor speaks about Shabbat. It calls it a *mo'ed* and a *mikra kodesh* although, in the regular meaning of these words, it is neither. *Mo'ed* means a specific time with a fixed date on the calendar. *Mikra kodesh* means either a sacred assembly, a time at which the nation gathered at the central Sanctuary, or a day made holy by the human court's fixing of the calendar.

Shabbat is none of these things. It has no fixed date on the calendar. It is not a time of national assembly. And it is not a day made holy by the declaration of the human court. Shabbat was the day made holy by God Himself at the beginning of time.

This strange way of describing Shabbat can be understood better if we look at the context in which it appears, in the chapters of the Torah that speak about holiness (Vayikra 18–27). The radical claim made in these chapters is that holiness, a term normally reserved for God, can be acquired by human beings when they act like God. The festivals are to Shabbat like the Sanctuary is to the universe. Both are humanly constructions versions of something holy created by God. By inviting human beings to create a Sanctuary and fix the monthly and yearly calendar, God gives us the dignity

of a holiness we can acquire actively as co-creators with God, not just receive passively as a gift). *Mikrah kodesh* and *mo'ed* when they appear in Vayikra have an extra meaning that they do not have in other places because they hint at the opening verse of the book: "He called [*Vayikra*] to Moses, and the Lord spoke to him in the Tent of Meeting [*Ohel Mo'ed*], saying..." (Vayikra 1:1). The focus is on *mikra* as "call" and *mo'ed* as "meeting." When the Torah uses these words uniquely in this chapter to apply to Shabbat as well as the festivals, it is focusing on the encounter between God and humanity in the arena of time. Whether it is God's call to us or ours to Him, whether God initiates the meeting or we do, holy time becomes a still point in the turning world when lover and beloved, Creator and creation, "make time" for one another and know one another in the special form of knowledge we call love.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. In what way do we create Yom Tov like God created Shabbat?
2. How do we know that it's not just God that can be holy, but that we can too?
3. How can Shabbat be a point in time when "Creator and creation make time for one another in love"?



IT ONCE HAPPENED...

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik once said: On Yom Tov each Jew was commanded to come close to the Shechinah (Divine Presence); this is the mitzvah of *aliya l'regel*, the festival pilgrimage. He stepped out from his home and walked to Jerusalem in search of the Shechinah. But Yom Tov is not the abode of the Shechinah. The Torah did not tell a Jew to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem on Shabbat. There is no need. On Shabbat the Shechinah knocks on the door. All we have to do is let Her in!

The Kotzker Rebbe once asked his students where God was to be found; they answered that "He fills all the world with His glory." He shook his head and said, "No, I asked where

is He to be found, not where He is." The students looked at the Rabbi with confusion and exasperation. "Did we not already say that He is everywhere?" "No, no," the Kotzker smiled at them. "You must understand that God is to be found in the place that you open up your hearts and let Him in!"

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. How is Yom Tov different from Shabbat according to Rabbi Soloveitchik?
2. How does the story of the Kotzker Rebbe help us understand how to "let the Shechinah" in on Shabbat?



THINKING MORE DEEPLY

Is this aspect of Shabbat, presented in *the Core Idea*, new and different from the Shabbat we find in other places in the Torah? Let's take a look at the two versions of the Ten Commandments, as they appear in Shemot and Devarim. Famously, the wording of the two versions is different. The Shemot account begins with the word *Zachor*, remember. The Devarim account begins with *Shamor*, "keep, guard, protect." But they differ more profoundly in their very understanding of the nature and significance of the day. In Shemot (20:7-9) Shabbat is a reminder of creation. In Devarim (5:11-14) there is no reference to creation. Instead the Torah speaks about a historical event: the Exodus. We keep Shabbat not because God rested on the seventh day but because He took our ancestors out of Egypt, from slavery to freedom. Therefore, Shabbat is a day of freedom even for servants, and even for domestic animals. One day in seven, no one is a slave.

Of course, both are true, and we integrate both accounts into the text of the Kiddush we make on Friday night. We call Shabbat a remembrance of creation (*zikaron lema'aseh bereishit*) as well as a reminder of the Exodus (*zecher liyetziat Mitzrayim*). However, once we set the Vayikra account in the context of these other two, a richer pattern emerges. There are three primary voices in the Torah: those of **Kingship**, **Priesthood**, and **Prophecy**.

These are the three fundamental leadership roles and they have distinctive modes of knowledge. Priests, Prophets, and the governing elite (the wise, the Elders, Kings and their courts) each have their own ways of thinking and speaking. Kings and courts use the language of *chochmah*, "wisdom." Priests teach Torah, the word of God for all time. Prophets have visions. They have "the word" of God not for all time but for this time. Prophecy is about history as the interaction between God and humanity. It is no coincidence that there

are three voices because, fundamental to Jewish faith is the belief that God is encountered in three ways: in **creation**, **revelation**, and **redemption**.

Wisdom is the ability to see God in creation, in the intricate complexity of the natural universe and the human mind. In contemporary terms, *chochmah* is a combination of the sciences and humanities: all that allows us to see the universe as the work of God and human beings as the image of God. **Revelation**, Torah, the specialty of the priest, is the ability to hear God in the form of the commanding voice, most characteristically in the form of law. Revelation is a matter not of seeing but of listening, in the deep sense of hearing and heeding, attending and responding. Wisdom tells us how things are. Revelation tells us how we should live. Prophetic consciousness is always focused on **redemption**, the long and winding road towards a society based on justice and compassion, love and forgiveness, peace and human dignity. The prophetic word is always related to history, to the present in relation to the past and the future: not history as a mere succession of events, but as an approach to or digression from the good society, the Promised Land, and the Messianic Age.

Creation, revelation, and redemption represent the three basic relationships within which Judaism and human life are set. **Creation** is God's relationship to the world. **Revelation** is God's relationship with us. When we apply revelation to creation, the result is **redemption**: the world in which God's will and ours coincide.

We now understand why the Torah contains three distinct accounts of Shabbat. The account in the first version of the Ten Commandments, "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth," is the Shabbat of creation. The account in the second version, "Remember that you were

slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out,” is the Shabbat of redemption. The parshat Emor account, spoken in the priestly voice, is the Shabbat of revelation.

In revelation, God calls to the people. That is why the middle book of the Torah that more than any other represents *Torat Kohanim*, “the law of the Priests,” begins with the word Vayikra, “and He called.” It is also why Shabbat is, uniquely here, included in the days “which you shall proclaim (*tikre’u*) as sacred convocations (*mikra’ei kodesh*),” with the double emphasis on the verb ‘k-r-a’, “to

call.” Shabbat is the day in which, in the stillness of rest and the silence of the soul, we hear the Vayikra of God.

Hence too, the word *mo’ed*, which in general means “appointed times,” but here means “meeting.” Judah Halevi, the eleventh-century poet and philosopher, said that on Shabbat, it is as if God had personally invited us to be dinner guests at His table. The Shabbat of revelation does not look back to the birth of the universe or forwards to the future redemption. It celebrates the present moment as our private time with God. It represents “the power of now.”



FROM THE THOUGHT OF RABBI SACKS

Our Shabbat is a religious institution, a memorial to creation, the day on which God Himself rested. But it is also and essentially a political institution. Shabbat is the greatest tutorial in liberty ever devised.

Pesach tells us how the Israelites won their freedom. Shabbat tells us how they *kept* it. One day in seven, Jews create a Messianic society. It is the day on which everyone, master and slave, employer and employee, even animals, experience unconditional freedom.

We neither work nor get others to work, manipulate nor allow ourselves to be manipulated. We may neither buy nor

be bought. It is the day on which all hierarchies, all relationships of power are suspended.

A Letter in the Scroll, p.130

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. How is Shabbat an example of a way to “apply revelation to creation” (see *Thinking More Deeply*) to achieve redemption?
2. Of the three accounts of Shabbat mentioned in *Thinking More Deeply*, which is closest to this description of the philosophy of Shabbat?



AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. What does Rabbi Sacks mean when he says that Shabbat can be a point in time when “Creator and creation make time for one another in love”?
2. Is your Shabbat like that? How can you make your Shabbat more like that?
3. What are the themes underlying the three accounts of Shabbat mentioned in this week’s *Covenant & Conversation*? Which of the three resonates with you the most?
4. The account of Shabbat in parshat Emor is of revelation – God calling to man (and this is found in the book called *Vayikra* – “and He called”). Can you hear God calling to you through Shabbat? What is He calling you to do?
5. What does Rabbi Sacks mean when he says that Shabbat has “three dimensions, of science, religion, and political ideology united in the transforming experience” of Shabbat?



QUESTION TIME

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THE CORE IDEA

1. The cycle of the week, culminating with Shabbat, was something created by God during the first seven days of creation. Shabbat is holy independently of humankind. However, the date of the festivals is fixed by us, starting with the first day of each month which we originally confirmed through the testimony of witnesses who spotted the new moon each month. Since the second exile from the Land of Israel, the system was changed and the Rabbis fixed the calendar, and in this way the festivals have still been fixed by the people and not God.
2. This radical idea (discussed in length in last week's *Covenant & Conversation* (Parshat Kedoshim) is the message of the Book of Vayikra and the Torah as a whole. We can be holy by acting in a manner similar to God. We achieve this by observing the mitzvot. In fact, the Torah tells us that all of humankind are created in the Image of God (Bereishit 1:26-27) and have the potential for holiness.
3. On Shabbat we cease to function as masters of creation, and step back to reflect on being a part of creation. Keeping Shabbat gives us the time and space to have a relationship with the Creator. We do this in a practical sense by refraining from melacha "work" on Shabbat, and instead focusing on the more spiritual aspects of our life.

IT ONCE HAPPENED...

1. Yom Tov is a time when we approach God, by, in Temple times, making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the festivals (Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot each have a specific mitzvah of *Aliya LaRegel* – pilgrimage to Jerusalem). Conversely, each week, on Shabbat, God makes His own pilgrimage to meet us where we are.
2. The message of the Kotzker Rebbe is that the Shechinah is ready to enter our lives if we only let Her in. If we are open to seeing Hashem in our lives, and making space for Hashem in our lives, then we will find the Shechinah there and available for an intimate relationship. For Rabbi Soloveitchik, Shabbat is a day that especially lends itself to this, if we only open our hearts to it.

FROM THE THOUGHT OF RABBI SACKS

1. Shabbat is a day where we apply the core values of the Torah (revelation) such as the dignity and rights of all people, and apply them to our real life world (creation) to arrive at a 25 hour period of "Messianic society" (redemption). We do this by ensuring that "everyone, master and slave, employer and employee, even animals, experience unconditional freedom... It is the day on which all hierarchies, all relationships of power are suspended."
2. The three accounts of Shabbat referred to are:
 - i. The first version of the Ten Commandments is the Shabbat of creation.
 - ii. The account in the second version is the Shabbat of redemption.
 - iii. The parshat Emor account, spoken in the priestly voice, is the Shabbat of revelation. The Shabbat described in this quote is the Shabbat of redemption.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. See *The Core Idea*, answer 3.
2. See *It Once Happened*. Shabbat is a day we mindfully step back from our everyday lives as masters of creation and make room for our relationship with God. If we find practical ways to do that, whether that be synagogue attendance, Torah learning experiences, or just time to breathe and think, our Shabbat can be this, and we can make space for God both on Shabbat and the rest of our lives.
3. See *From the Thought of Rabbi Sacks*, answer 2.
4. This is an open question with no right or wrong answers, but here are some possible directions to focus the conversation. Perhaps we can hear the voice of God calling on us to enjoy and protect the creation (and thereby refrain from showing mastery over it for 25 hours). Or Shabbat could be the call to reconnect to friends and family in a way we cannot during the week. Maybe we can hear the voice of God in the socio-moral aspects of Shabbat whereby "everyone, master and slave, employer and employee, even animals, experience unconditional freedom... the day on which all hierarchies, all relationships of power are suspended" and the call to create a society where this can be the case even during the week. Or maybe we just hear the call of God to connect and form a stronger relationship.
5. These are the three dimensions of Shabbat found in the three accounts of Shabbat mentioned here: Shabbat of Creation (science), Shabbat of Revelation (religion), and Shabbat of Redemption (political ideology that should heal the problems in society). While secular society fragments these and compartmentalises them, Shabbat can be a model whereby they are united in a "transforming experience" helping us to build a world where these three can work together to achieve a redeemed society.