



Shemirat Shabbat

We find many essential elements of Judaism discussed in this week's *parashah*, including the *Aseret Hadibrot*. There are some notable differences between the way they are written here in our *parashah* and earlier in *Parashat Yitro*. One difference is regarding the mitzvah to keep Shabbat. Our *parashah* teaches "*shamor*," we should guard Shabbat, and in *Parashat Yitro* we are told "*zachor*," remember Shabbat. Chazal thus derive that these two words were uttered at the very same time, "*shamor ve'zachor bedibbur echad*" Both directives, guarding and remembering, are equated as one unit. Hence, women who are obligated in the "*lo ta'aseh*," the negative commandment of Shabbat, are equally obligated in the "*aseh*," the positive commandment of Shabbat even

though they are usually exempt from time-bound mitzvot. What is the significance of this teaching?

Rav Pincus *zt'l* in *Tiferet Shimshon* offers a fascinating insight. Generally, positive mitzvot add holiness and afford connection between us and the Divine, while the prohibitions safeguard us to ensure that we do not damage our soul. The '*mitzvot lo ta'aseh*' do not add kedushah, rather they are a protective element to keep us in constant alignment. Shabbat is an exception. The '*shamor*' aspect of Shabbat helps us achieve higher levels of holiness.

In developing this idea Rav Pincus explains that throughout the Torah, when we are given a prohibition, it is because the forbidden act will damage our soul. Murder, theft, speaking negatively about another, are all obvious examples. However, refraining from plowing a field on Shabbat does not have the same effect. The purpose of the Shabbat prohibitions is to help us remove barriers that interfere with our connection to Hashem. He offers the following example. Let us say one hangs a painting over a window. Although there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the painting, it nevertheless blocks the flow of fresh air into the room. The '*shamor*' of Shabbat are those elements that will detract from our connection with Hashem and prevent us from experiencing the beauty and holiness of Shabbat.

This helps us to understand why the punishment for violating Shabbat is so much

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more severe than for other prohibitions. It is not the act per se that is faulty, rather, it is the effect that the act generates, essentially blocking our relationship with Hashem.

The Torah teaches, “*v’shamru bnei Yisrael et haShabbat, la’asot et haShabbat.*” (Shemot 31:16) It is by observing the negative prohibitions that we create the special Shabbat atmosphere; ‘*shamor*’ and ‘*zachor*’ share the same objective.

As we begin our ascent to the period of the *Yamim Nora'im*, it behooves us to be aware of the many opportunities we have to deepen our level of connection and to experience Shabbat as a day of being in Hashem’s presence for 25 hours. Or, as Rav Pincus puts it, to designate a “25-hour long shemoneh esrei,” a space exclusively for you and Hashem. ■

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