

# Meshech Chochma

## - Jacob Solomon

*Remember the day of Shabbat to sanctify it... for in six days G-d made the heavens and the earth... and He rested on the seventh day. Therefore G-d blessed the Shabbat day and made it holy (20:8-11).*

The Aseret HaDibrot in this parasha grounds the Shabbat in the Creation. Some 40 years later, Moshe repeated the Aseret HaDibrot and on that occasion, he grounded them in Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim:

*Safeguard the Sabbath day to sanctify it... You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and that G-d took you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore G-d has commanded you to make the Shabbat day (D'varim 5:12-15).*

The Ramban explains that these are two distinct aspects of Shabbat: the Friday night Kiddush emphasizes how Shabbat simultaneously connects with both the Creation and the Exodus, two very different things. Both have the common theme of illustrating G-d's mastery over the universe. The Creation put the laws of nature into place. The Exodus, with the plagues and the events at the Red Sea, show His capacity to override the laws of nature at will. In

that way, they complement each other. Thus, as the Meshech Chochma emphasizes, Shabbat and its practices are to create the space for Am Yisrael to learn about the ways of G-d and connect with Him, to learn Torah without distraction from the worldly affairs of the other six days, and to be free to enjoy the food and drink of His Creation without having to worry about how to grow, produce, or pay for them.

On that basis, the Meshech Chochma explains the rather puzzling dictum that observing Shabbat along the lines that the Torah commands is for the Jewish people only. Not for the general population (Sanhedrin 58b). For the first element: where He created the universe and instituted the laws of nature, is for everyone, Jew and non-Jew alike. But the second element, inextricably combined with the first, is where he suspended the laws of nature in the Ten Plagues and the splitting of the Red Sea. All that was directed exclusively at Am Yisrael, who were the sole witnesses and beneficiaries of His intervention. Thus, as the Ramban explains at the end of Parashat Bo, by experiencing how He can intervene in the rules of nature for Klal Yisrael, Klal Yisrael in turn can appreciate how not only miraculous Divine intervention, but also nature itself are both miracles; the

laws of nature are thus miracles that repeat themselves. In other words, experiencing the abnormal, casts new light on the normal. The Israelites experienced the abnormal, and were thus able to relate to the normal, the creation, on a much higher level and this is promoted through Shabbat. This also throws light on the Torah's constant urging to remember Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim, with which the twice-daily Sh'ma declaration concludes.

This helps to explain the Gemara where G-d has a special gift in his treasure house which he gave to the Jewish people: the gift of Shabbat (Beitza 16a). For it is only relevant to the Jewish people as they were those who experienced Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim, and thus it was a gift for them, not for the general public whose ancestors had not experienced those events at first hand. Perhaps it is for that reason that the Gemara is so harsh on non-Jews if they deliberately observe Shabbat in the manner required by Jews. In support, I'd like to suggest that Shabbat to Am Yisrael is a gift from G-d's treasure house, as is t'ruma to a kohen. A Jew who is not a kohen who eats t'ruma on purpose (during Temple times) has transgressed the law of m'ila, for which the penalty is death (Vayikra 22:9). That gift from G-d is for kohanim only, not for the general

Jewish community. Similarly, Shabbat is G-d's gift for the Kohen, the Levi, and the Yisrael; for all Klal Yisrael. Not for the general community. ☹