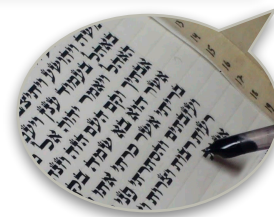




The Collective Conversation

*Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community*



Sefer Shemot

Parshat Vayakhel • Shabbat Shekalim

Adar א 5784 / March 2024

Carrying the Torch

By Alvin Pasternak

In the last week's parsha, B'nei Yisrael committed the sin of the golden calf. Hashem was prepared to destroy us. Moshe Rabbeinu prayed with all of his heart, and Hashem forgave B'nei Yisrael. Hashem showed his love for B'nei Yisrael by approving the building of the Mishkan.

This week's parsha, *Vayakhel*, starts with the repetition of the Fourth Commandment, B'nei Yisrael's obligation to observe Shabbat. The Rabbis learn that the proximity of the laws of Shabbat to the building of the Mishkan teaches us that the tasks performed during the building of the Mishkan are prohibited on Shabbat.

Of the 39 melachot, two are singled out, the prohibition against making a fire and the restriction against carrying from the private domain to the public domain. All of the melachot are important, so why are these singled out? What is the special significance of these two melachot?

Let's start with the prohibition against making a fire:

לֹא-תִבְעֲרוּ אֵשׁ בְּכֹל מִשְׁכְּנֵיכֶם בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת:

*You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day
(Shemot 35:3).*

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, a prominent religious thinker who lived in 19th-century Germany, explains the profound connection between fire and carrying and its impact on our existence.

When one thinks of fire, it is common to associate it with destruction. Forest fires can take lives and destroy precious natural resources. One can burn one's finger when lighting a match. On the other hand, the ability to produce fire allows us mastery over the materials of the world. We can create tools and manufacture and produce everyday items. On Shabbat, we recognize that our ability to use our creative and productive power with fire to control matter was provided by Hashem. On Shabbat, our physical relationship with the world is put on hold as we reflect on our spiritual relationship to Hashem.

The other melacha that is emphasized is refraining from hotzaah, carrying on Shabbat. The extreme importance of this melacha is proclaimed by Jeremiah:

וְלֹא-תוֹצִיאוּ מִשָּׂא מִבֵּיתְכֶם בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וְכָל-מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וְקִדַּשְׁתֶּם אֶת-יּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת
כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אֶת-אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם

Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, neither do any work, but hallow the Sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers
(Jeremiah 17:22).

While making fire shows that we are masters of matter in the physical world, carrying pertains to our relationship with others in our social world. We are a community. We further our public purposes by participating and carrying into the public domain.

When we refrain from making fire on Shabbat, we recognize Hashem's power over nature. When we refrain from carrying on Shabbat, we recognize Hashem's control of history and human affairs. By keeping the laws of Shabbat, we comprehend the dual power and control that Hashem has over nature and matters of national life and the Jewish State.

On Shabbat, we subordinate our social life and reflect on our spiritual relationship with Hashem.

Now we can see the parallels between fire and carrying and the importance that the Torah gave to their emphasis above all of the other melachot.

When we refrain from making fire on Shabbat, we recognize Hashem's power over nature. When we refrain from carrying on Shabbat, we recognize Hashem's control of history and human affairs. By keeping the laws of Shabbat, we comprehend the dual power and control that Hashem has over nature and matters of national life and the Jewish State.

We now have a better understanding of the relationship between the act of Creation and the events of the Exodus. Hashem created the world to include Shabbat. When Hashem took us out of Egypt, He used the plagues to show the world His control over nature. As we left Egypt, Hashem toppled the social structure of Egypt, and Egypt no longer was a great state. As we have seen, the concepts of nature and state are exemplified by fire and carrying. The significance of Shabbat observance cannot be overstated.

The prohibited melachot, although seemingly restrictive, actually have a positive effect. By refraining from these activities with the proper mindset, concentration, and approach, we elevate ourselves to a level that cannot be achieved on other days of the week. This brings us closer to Hashem, helps us connect with Him, and enhances our understanding of our purpose in life.

Alvin and Marilyn dedicate this dvar Torah in honor of the upcoming marriage of their daughter Samantha to Gabriel, son of Rachelle and Eyal Altaras of Teaneck, New Jersey.

Reserve a favorite parsha • Celebrate a family simcha • Honor a legacy • Sign-up [HERE](#)

The Collective Conversation is a project of the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Living Torah Fund

Learning and Growing Together as a Community • Learning as Legacy

[Click here](#) to see past issues of The Collective Conversation