

A Big "To-Do"

PARSHA INSIGHTS - VAYAKHEL (5760)

SHABBOS - A DAY OF WORK

“Moshe assembled the entire congregation of the *Bnai Yisroel* [the Children of Israel] and said to them, ‘These are the words that Hashem has commanded you to do. (An alternate translation is: these are the objects that Hashem commanded to be made - the components of the *Mishkan* [Tabernacle].) Work may be done six days, but the seventh day must be holy to you...’” (35:1-2). Moshe assembled the nation, instructing them to donate materials for the *Mishkan*. If so, why is the *mitzvah* [commandment] of *shmiras Shabbos* [observing the Sabbath] mentioned here? *Rashi* cites the *Mechilta* - Moshe’s message was that building the *Mishkan* would not override *Shabbos* observance. Even this holy project had to cease when the seventh day arrived.

Notice the first verse: “These are the words which Hashem has commanded you TO DO (*la’asos osam*).” The matter mentioned right after this is *shmiras Shabbos*. What is the “DOING” aspect of *Shabbos*? Is it not a day of rest? Wouldn’t it be more appropriate to describe it as a day of “NOT DOING?”

In addition, check last week’s *parsha* [Torah portion], 31:16. “The *Bnai Yisroel* shall keep the *Shabbos*, to do (or maintain - *la’asos*) the *Shabbos* for their generations...” Many people recite this *pasuk* [verse] in *Shabbos kiddush* [sanctification of the day]. Is *Shabbos* a day of maintenance? A time of labor? A period of toil? What is the meaning of “LA’ASOS?”

A magnificent comment on this is found in the *Sforno* in *Parshas Va’eschanan*. Moshe taught the *Aseres Hadibros* [Ten Utterances or Commandments], to the second generation in the Plains of Moav. The fourth statement was to obey all the laws of *Shabbos*. Moshe reminded the people that their parents had first been familiarized with *Shabbos* concepts at the location called Mara, a stopping point for the Jews before *Har Sinai* [Mount Sinai] (see *Beshalach* 15:25). What attitude was required of *Bnai Yisroel* concerning *Shabbos*? It is not sufficient to sanctify *Shabbos* merely by abstaining from the forbidden forms of labor. This is an admirable feat requiring sophistication and thorough training and education, but there is more to *Shabbos* than abstinence. One must be INVOLVED in Torah and *mitzvos* [commandments] on *Shabbos*. A Jew needs to immerse himself in Torah study every day, but *Shabbos* is a most favorable time for this **labor of love**.

Sforno shows the connection this has to the *pasuk* by Mara, where we first heard about *Shabbos*. “DO what is upright in His eyes, give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes...” (15:26). That is why Moshe, in the second set of *Dibros* [Utterances], referred back to the precepts we received by Mara, even before *Har Sinai*. Observe *Shabbos* in the manner you were informed at Mara, to DO WHAT IS RIGHT in His eyes. *Shmiras Shabbos* is active, not passive. It requires an enormous amount of “DOING”.

One cannot deny that we need to refresh our bodies with some extra sleep and delicious foods on *Shabbos*. There is abundant evidence in the written and oral Torah to this reality. Today’s point is that we must use these enjoyments for spiritual growth, and Torah study is of paramount importance.

More can be said about this topic, but these insights should enlighten us at least a bit. Let us transform our day of rest into a dynamic experience of spiritual development, as we MAKE SOMETHING of each and every *Shabbos*.

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