



Parashah Insights
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Parashat Emor

The Dimensions of Olam, Shanah, Nefesh

Mitzvot, Shabbat, and the Festivals

“And you will keep My commandments and you will fulfill them, I am Hashem. Do not desecrate My Holy Name, and I will be sanctified among the children of Israel, I am Hashem Who sanctifies you, Who took you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d. I am Hashem.

“And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and you will say to them, these are the Festivals of Hashem which you shall designate as holy assemblies, these are My Festivals. Six days you shall do work, and on the seventh day, Shabbat Shabbaton, a holy assembly. You shall not do any work, it is Shabbat for Hashem in all your dwelling places. These are the Festivals of Hashem, holy assemblies which you shall designate at their appointed times” (*Vayikra* 22:31-23:4).

These verses instruct us in general to fulfill all of the *mitzvot* in the Torah. “**You will keep My commandments**” refers to the Torah’s negative commandments, and “**you will fulfill them**” refers to the positive commandments.

The Torah then goes on to warn us, “**Do not desecrate (*lo tihalelu*) My Holy Name.**” A sinner desecrates Hashem’s Name by expelling the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence), as it were, leaving the world empty and void (*halal*) of Hashem’s holiness. In contrast, fulfilling the commandments sanctifies Hashem’s Name, causing His Divine Presence to rest upon His people and filling the world with His sanctity. It was



for this specific purpose that Hashem “took you out of the Land of Egypt – to be your G-d.” The Al-mighty liberated the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage in order for them to accept Him as their G-d, and serve Him by fulfilling commandments which link them to G-d.

These verses are immediately followed by the commandments concerning the Festivals: “And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and you will say to them, these are the Festivals of Hashem which you shall designate as holy assemblies, these are My Festivals.’” However, before beginning the detailed discussion of the Torah-ordained Festivals, the Torah adds an apparently unrelated verse concerning Shabbat: “Six days you shall do work, and on the seventh day, Shabbat Shabbaton, a holy assembly. You shall not do any work, it is Shabbat for Hashem in all your dwelling places.” The Torah then returns to the topic of the Festivals: “These are the Festivals of Hashem, holy assemblies which you shall designate at their appointed times” (ibid. 23:1-4).

Our Sages raise an obvious question, cited by Rashi: why are the commandments concerning the Festivals interrupted by the verse about Shabbat? While Shabbat is certainly a sanctified, holy day, it is not a Festival – it is in a different category.

The Sanctity of Shabbat

The sanctity of Shabbat dates back to Creation (*Bereshit* 2:3). Its holiness is fixed and permanent; it is not dependent on lunar cycles or the sanctification of the new moon by the Jewish people. Starting from the seventh day of Creation, every seventh day is by definition Shabbat. It does not need to be determined by human beings. Its sanctity is Divine and it comes into effect automatically, so to speak, as we learn from the verse, “And G-d blessed the seventh day, and He sanctified it” (*Bereshit* 2:3). In contrast, the dates of the Festivals (*Moadim*) are determined by time, as we learn from the word *moed*, literally translated as “designated time.” They are dependent on the monthly appearance of the new moon as reported by two reliable witnesses, and on the calculation of leap years established by the *bet din*. Establishing the days on which any Festival falls requires a declaration by the *bet din*, who fix the day of *Rosh Hodesh*¹ based on the testimony of witnesses (*Baba Batra* 121a, Rambam, *Hilchot Kiddush HaHodesh* 1:5-7). In our times, the Jewish calendar operates based on the principles and calculations handed down by the Sages. While the dates of *Rosh Hodesh* and the Festivals are no longer declared by

¹ Literally, “the head of the month”; the appearance of the new moon marking the beginning of the new Hebrew month.



the *bet din*, they still depend on the expert calculations of Torah scholars knowledgeable in this field (Rambam *ibid.*, 5:1-6)

This distinction is highlighted in the difference in wording of the *Shemoneh Esre* for Shabbat, and that of the Festivals. On Shabbat we say, “Blessed are You, Hashem, Who sanctifies the Sabbath.” In other words, it is not we, the Jewish people, who sanctify Shabbat – it is the Al-mighty Himself. On the other hand, on Festivals we say, “Blessed are You Hashem, Who sanctifies Israel and the times [of the Festivals]. This blessing does mention the sanctity of the people of Israel, even before the sanctity of the Festivals, because it is the Jews who designate the dates of the Festivals; it is up to them to sanctify the new moon at the beginning of the month, establishing the date of *Rosh Hodesh*, and by extension, the days when the Festivals will fall.

The difference between Shabbat and the Festivals is even more apparent in the blessing recited when a Festival falls on Shabbat: “Blessed are You, Hashem, Who sanctifies Shabbat, Israel, and the times [of the Festivals]” (*Betzah* 17a).

In his commentary on this teaching of the Sages, Rashi writes that concerning the Festivals we first mention the sanctity of Israel, because they are the ones who sanctify the Festivals – if Israel had not been sanctified, they would not have been able to establish the new months and announce the date of the Festivals in the *bet din*. The sequence of this blessing is chronological. First there was Shabbat, sanctified by the Creator; then came Israel, whom He sanctified as His nation; and they in turn sanctify the Festivals.

If the sanctity of Shabbat is so different from that of the Festivals, why are they mentioned together in our *parashah*? In addition, why is the commandment to fulfill the *mitzvot* in general (“**and you will keep My commandments**”) mentioned with the commandments concerning Shabbat and the Festivals?

Basics of Creation

We can answer these questions by considering a fundamental principle. *Sefer Yetzirah* (3:8, 6:2), a profound Kabbalistic work written by our Forefather Avraham, discusses three basic aspects which encompass all of Creation: *olam*, “world”; *shanah*, “year”; and *nefesh*, “soul.” *Olam* is space, *shanah* is time, and *nefesh* is the spirituality which is their life force.

The Creator Himself is by definition *en sof* – He is infinite, with no limitations of space, time or power. These three dimensions are the diametric opposite of Hashem’s limitless Being. Let us try to understand why *olam*, *shanah*, and *nefesh* are essential in order for the created world to fulfill its purpose of bestowing Divine reward on man.



Hashem in His wisdom wished to create a limited, imperfect world, bound by the restrictions of space and time, because it was only in this setting that man would contend with the trials of choosing between good and bad. Because the Al-mighty Himself is perfect and unlimited, it follows that anything He creates must also by definition be perfect. In a perfect world, however, there can be no evil – His Presence would be so obvious that sin would be impossible. In contrast, an imperfect world presents a continual flow of challenges and temptations which call upon us to use our Free Will to choose right from wrong. In Hashem’s Divine plan for Creation, man earns eternal reward by prevailing in this struggle. If there is no evil, there is also no possibility of Free Will; in a world where there is only perfect good, there are no choices to make and no temptations to overcome.

Hashem initially created very exalted, spiritual worlds. These worlds were a reflection of Divine perfection, because they were as close to the Creator’s Own perfection as any entity can be. He then made a series of successively lower worlds, increasingly distant from these lofty levels of perfection. Each world was more material and physical – and as a result, more imperfect. At the bottom of the ladder, so to speak, was our physical world. In order to create these lower levels, the Al-mighty concealed His unlimited power and greatness. In Kabbalistic teachings, this “concealment” is called *tzitzum*. *Tzimtzum* allowed for the creation of an “imperfect” world bound by the limits of space and time, where both good and evil, and as a result, Free Will, can exist.

Our physical world is very far removed from the spiritual perfection of the Higher Worlds, where Hashem’s Divine light is revealed to the maximum capacity that Creation can receive. In the pervasive darkness of this world, choosing good over evil is neither simple nor obvious – it is exceedingly difficult.

It is the task of the Jewish people in this world to rectify and perfect Creation through Torah and *mitzvot*, illuminating the darkness of the material world with Hashem’s Divine light. By using our Free Will to serve Hashem, we help perfect the world, bringing about the day when there will be no more conflict and confusion between good and evil, and “the entire world is filled with knowledge of Hashem, as the water fills the ocean” (*Yeshayahu* 11:9). When that day comes, it will be unmistakably clear even in the physical world that Hashem is One.

In sum, the Al-mighty created our limited world, bound by time and space, by concealing His full greatness. As we explained, the limitations of space, time, and power (*olam, shanah, nefesh*) in the created world are necessary in order for man to earn reward by struggling in a deficient material world, where the option of evil is always available. In this way, the Jewish people rectify and perfect these three dimensions, revealing Hashem’s Divine light in the world, and annulling the limitations of space, time and power.



Mitzvot and Nefesh

With this profound concept in mind, we can explain why our *parashah* links the apparently unrelated commandments to fulfill all of the Al-mighty's *mitzvot*, keep Shabbat, and observe the Festivals. Based on the teachings of the Arizal, the Rashash writes that they correspond to three separate categories of *tikun* (rectification) which perfect both the higher spiritual worlds and the physical aspects of Creation (*Nehar Shalom*, p. 39c).

The Torah first tells us, “**Keep My [negative] commandments and... fulfill [My positive commandments].**” The *tikun* achieved by fulfilling *mitzvot* corresponds to *nefesh*. Every single *mitzvah* done by every single Jew is an entire world on its own, extending from the higher spiritual worlds down to our physical world. Every day, even every hour and every minute, has a new *tikun* for every one of the six hundred thousand souls of the Jewish nation – at any moment in time, a Jew can fulfill one of the six hundred and thirteen *mitzvot*, each a world on its own.

Rabbi Hayyim Vital teaches that the Torah's two hundred and forty-eight positive commandments and three hundred and sixty-five negative commandments, a total of six hundred and thirteen, correspond to the soul's two hundred and forty-eight spiritual limbs and three hundred and sixty-five spiritual sinews. The body which clothes the soul has a parallel two hundred and forty-eight physical limbs and three hundred and sixty-five physical sinews. Each limb and sinew is rectified and perfected by fulfilling its related *mitzvah*, whether positive or negative (*Shaare Kedushah, Helek Alef, Shaar Alef*).

All Jewish souls have their original source in the great soul of Adam, the first man. This soul, instilled by the Al-mighty Himself (see *Bereshit 2:7*), encompassed all the six hundred thousand souls of Israel (*Shaar HaGilgulim, Hakdamah Yud-alef; Nehar Shalom*, p. 9d-11b). After Adam sinned, many of these souls left him (*Shaar HaGilgulim, Hakdamah Zayin and Hakdamah Yud-bet*).

These six hundred thousand souls are subdivided into many millions of souls, derived from the *Otzar HaNeshamot* (Repository of Souls). Each soul is composed of six hundred and thirteen components, corresponding to the six hundred and thirteen commandments which it is obligated to fulfill. Each *mitzvah* rectifies the related component of the soul, as well as a parallel component of the higher spiritual worlds. Every minute of the world's existence provides its own opportunity for each of the six hundred thousand souls to fulfill any of the six hundred and thirteen commandments. Every *mitzvah* fulfilled at any moment is a complete rectification on its own, related to the corresponding spiritual world.

When all Jewish souls attain the level of perfection they enjoyed before Adam's sin, the Al-mighty's unlimited power will be revealed in full. This is the *tikun* of



nefesh, soul: when the souls of Israel achieve complete perfection, Hashem's greatness will be revealed as the ultimate life force of all Creation.

The souls of the Jewish nation are a *helek Eloka mimaal* (a G-dly entity which descends from the Higher Worlds), instilled by the Creator Himself (*Bereshit* 2:7). As such, they are an extension of the Creator, the true "*nefesh*" of all that exists (*Nefesh HaHayyim*, *Shaar Alef*, end of Chapter 3, beginning of Chapter 4). We find allusion to this concept in the verses, "Give might to G-d" (*Tehillim* 68:35) and "To G-d, we give strength" (ibid. 60:14; see *Nefesh HaHayyim* ibid.). Man clearly cannot "give strength to G-d" in any literal sense. He is all-powerful, and is not changed or affected by our actions. However, it was His Will to structure a world in which Divine bounty and blessing are only granted in reward for man's good deeds. He desires to bestow an abundance of good on us, but is only able to so, as it were, when we provide the opportunity. By fulfilling His commandments, we "allow" Him to shower us with good. It is in this sense that man "gives strength to G-d" – it is our deeds which enable Him to fulfill His Will by giving, so to speak.

"I am Hashem"

This profound concept is expressed in the verses which command us to fulfill the *mitzvot*: **"And you will keep My commandments and you will fulfill them, I am Hashem. Do not desecrate My Holy Name, and I will be sanctified among the children of Israel. I am Hashem Who sanctifies you, Who took you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d. I am Hashem."**

The commandment to observe the six hundred and thirteen *mitzvot*, positive and negative (**"And you will keep My commandments and you will fulfill them"**) is followed by the words, **"I am Hashem."** "Hashem," the sacred Name of G-d which consists of the four letters *yud-keh-vav-keh* (the *Shem Havayah*), is the Divine Name which represents a limited revelation of the Al-mighty's great power, as necessary for the creation and ongoing operation of the world (*hashgahah pratit*). Fulfilling the *mitzvot* (**"you will keep... and fulfill"**) brings about the revelation of Hashem represented by the *Shem Havayah* (**"I am Hashem"**).

This revelation generates life, light and holiness in all created entities, from the highest to the lowest. All creation becomes a perfect manifestation of Hashem's light and truth, and evil and imperfection in all their forms will cease to exist.

Rabbi Hayyim Vital finds allusion to the connection between *mitzvot* and revelation of the *Shem Havayah* by using one of several systems of *tzirufe otiyot* (rearrangement of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet). In the system commonly called *at bash gar*, the letters at the beginning of the Hebrew alphabet are linked to



corresponding letters at the end of the alphabet.² In *at bash gar*, the word *mitzvah* corresponds to the Divine Name *yud-keh-vav-keh*. The letters *mem* and *tzadi*, the first two letters of the word *mitzvah*, correspond to the letters *yud* and *keh*, the first two letters of Hashem's Name. The last two letters of the word *mitzvah* are themselves *vav* and *keh*, the last two letters of the *Shem Havayah* (Introduction to *Shaar HaMitzvot*, p. 2b). Every *mitzvah* we fulfill helps complete the revelation of the *Shem Havayah* in this world.

The commandment to fulfill the *mitzvot* is followed by the words, “**Do not desecrate My Holy Name,**” because as we said, transgressing the Torah's positive and negative commandments causes *hillul Hashem* (desecration of Hashem's Name). The sin expels Hashem's Divine Presence from the world, so to speak, leaving behind a void (*halal*). This is the literal meaning of the term *hillul Hashem*.

The verse continues, “**and I will be sanctified among** (literally “within”) **the children of Israel, I am Hashem Who sanctifies you, Who took you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d. I am Hashem.**” The Al-mighty is sanctified through (“among”) the Jewish people. The spirituality of the Jewish people represents the power of the Al-mighty, revealed in a limited manner in this world. When the Jewish people perfect themselves through Torah and *mitzvot* in this world, the revelation of Hashem's power in this world also becomes complete, and they in turn are sanctified by the revelation of Hashem's holy light (“**I am Hashem Who sanctifies you**”). This complete revelation is the aspect of *nefesh*.

“**I am Hashem Who sanctifies you, Who took you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d. I am Hashem.**” The Exodus from Egypt, which culminated in the Jewish people receiving the Torah as Hashem's chosen nation, is related to the concept of “**I am Hashem**” because all the *mitzvot* were realized due to the Exodus from Egypt.

In Egypt Hashem wrought incredible overt miracles which proved beyond doubt that He is the Creator Who rules the world with *hashgahah pratit* (ongoing individual Divine Providence). It was through the great miracles of the Exodus that Hashem's active involvement in the world and man's affairs, represented by the *Shem Havayah*, was first revealed. This is why the verse concludes, “**Who took you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d. I am Hashem**” (*Vayikra* 22:31-33). The Al-mighty freed us from Egyptian bondage so that we would receive His Torah and fulfill its commandments. From then on, our *mitzvot* would reveal His Name in the world, just as He revealed it through the miracles of the Exodus.

² For example, *alef*, the first letter, is linked to *tav*, the last letter (את). *Bet*, the second letter, is linked to *shin*, the second to last letter (בש). *Gimel*, the third letter, is linked to *resh*, the third to last letter (גר), and so on.



Shabbat and Olam

The verse which follows speaks of the sanctity of Shabbat, corresponding to *olam*, “world” or space: **“Six days you shall do work, and on the seventh day, Shabbat Shabbaton, a holy assembly. You shall not do any work, it is Shabbat for Hashem in all your dwelling places.”** Shabbat is related to space, specifically, the space which came into being when Hashem concealed the full extent of His infinite powers in order to create the world. This “space” refers to all the Higher Worlds, including *Atzilut*, and also to the successively lower worlds of *Beriyah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*.³ These worlds all exist within space.

The Rashash explains that Shabbat corresponds to *olam* because it is part of Creation, which consisted of six days followed by a seventh day of rest. Keeping Shabbat rectifies and perfects our physical world and the higher spiritual worlds, which were all created within space. Our Sages teach, “The world was created with ten Utterances” (*Avot* 5:1). The rectification of *olam* is associated with cycles of ten, consisting of days, weeks and months, which add up to years and decades. The years and decades of the world’s existence are counted in multiples of ten – from ten to one hundred, from one hundred to one thousand, from one thousand to two thousand, eventually adding up to six thousand.⁴ Just as every *mitzvah* brings about its own specific *tikun*, each of these units of tens, hundreds and thousands has its own separate *tikun*.

As we explained, the sanctity of Shabbat is different than that of the Festivals. The Festivals are sanctified by the Jewish people, while Shabbat is not dependent on man and his actions. The continuing sanctity of Shabbat dates back to the seventh day of Creation, when the Al-mighty Himself blessed it and sanctified it (*Bereshit* 2:3). It is an inseparable part of the worlds which Hashem created as entities existing within space. While the blessing and holiness of Shabbat are from Hashem, they are intensified when the Jewish people observe the seventh day as the Day of Rest. Keeping Shabbat brings Hashem’s light into the dimension of *olam*, space. Although Shabbat is related to space, it does have an element of time, because it is always on the seventh day. However, this element of time in Shabbat is only a framework which sets it apart from the other days of the week as a special day, allowing its holiness to flow into space (*olam*) unhindered.

³ Kabbalistic teachings mention four created worlds. *Olam HaAtzilut* (the World in Which Hashem Reveals Himself) is the highest. In descending order, the other three are *Olam HaBeriyah* (the World of the Throne); *Olam HaYetzirah* (the World of the Angels); and *Olam HaAsiyah*, the physical world of earthly activity.

⁴ The Sages teach that the world in its current form will exist for six thousand years (*Sanhedrin* 97a).



Festivals and Time (Shanah)

The Festivals correspond to *shanah*, the dimension of time, because they are all linked to time. They depend on the sanctification of the New Moon, and their *tikun* is associated with cycles of seven – days, weeks, months and years, adding up to units of *Shemittah* (seven years) and *Yovel* (seven *Shemittah* cycles followed by the *Yovel* year). The dimension of time is brought to perfection by the Jewish people, who sanctify the Festivals ordained by the Torah. Their holiness is generated entirely by our actions, unlike Shabbat, which was sanctified for eternity by the Al-mighty at the time of Creation.

Our fulfillment of *mitzvot* brings together the three aspects of *olam*, *shanah*, *nefesh*. There can be no months (*shanah*, time) without days (*olam*, the creation of the world), and at the center of every *mitzvah*, Shabbat and the Festivals included, is the Jew, bearer of a G-dly soul (*nefesh*) who fulfills it, drawing down spiritual bounty to all created worlds.

In essence, fulfillment of all the *mitzvot* within the framework of time, including Shabbat and the Festivals, sums up the task of the Jewish people in this world: the rectification of the three dimensions of *olam*, *shanah*, *nefesh* which are the essence and foundation of all Creation. By so doing, we sanctify His holy Name and draw Divine light down into the world – primarily upon ourselves, as the nation who cause this sanctification. We uplift ourselves and all the worlds, bringing closer the time when Hashem's true, limitless power, concealed for the six thousand years of the world's existence, is revealed. On that great day, all mankind will know that "Hashem is One and His Name is One" (*Zechariah* 14:9).

This essay contains divre Torah. Please treat it with proper respect.