

Shabat Observance

Commentary to Parshat Vayakel

By HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

Copyright © 2008 by Ariel Bar Tzadok. All rights reserved.

According to Kabbalistic language our universe is called the Olam HaAsiyah. Literally this would translate as the Domain of Action. I cannot think of a more fitting description. While many religions seek to define proper beliefs, Torah is more interested in what one does more than in what one believes. Indeed, regardless of what one believes, one cannot be said to be following the Torah path unless one is acting in the prescribed way that Torah dictates by performing (or not performing) its edicts. Torah is all about what you do. What you believe plays a much smaller role.



In Parshat Vayakel (Ex. 35), Moshe reminds the Israelite nation of the obligation to observe the Shabat. One cannot even kindle a flame on this special day. The Torah narrative then proceeds to discuss the actual construction of the Tabernacle and its accoutrements. Our Sages note the textual relationship of one topic to the other and extrapolate that their joint positioning is a subtle hint to the ancient oral law that defined the forbidden works on the Shabat. Simply, the making of the Tabernacle and its accoutrements were prohibited on the Shabat therefore any act or activity used in making of them was defined as the types of work prohibited on Shabat. Actions, behaviors, deeds, these are what Torah commands and prohibits. You can believe in them or not but you still have to do them.

Secular law in this respect is no different from Torah law. The legal authorities do not care what the population thinks about obeying the law; they are only concerned about people's compliance with the law. The law allows you to believe whatever you wish, for example, whether or not you chose to believe that a law is or is not fair, or whether it is or is not applicable to you. You can believe whatever you wish as long as you uphold the law and do not violate it. Penalties for violation are levied against the perpetrator of prohibited activity, not against those who have different views.

The religious principles of Torah are eloquently summed up by the 13 Articles of Faith penned by RaMBaM (Maimonides). These define what a Torah observant human being believes. Yet, even if one were to embrace these articles fully and yet not follow the laws of the Torah, such a one is considered a criminal under Torah law. On the other hand, as long as one is fully observant of the laws, then even if

he/she holds different views from those expressed by RaMBaM, as long as those views do not contradict Torah and thus brings one into a position of violating Torah law, one is not considered a criminal under Torah law.

From the Kabbalistic point of view, this world of ours called Asiyah, the world of doing (action), is said to be rectified through the performance of deeds. Mistakes of the intellect are said to blemish a higher realm called the Domain of Mind (Olam HaBeriah). Therefore, Torah law does not stipulate too many laws based upon belief. Torah law obligates us to believe that G-d is the Supreme Creator and that He alone is G-d. These laws are summed up in the first of the Ten Commandments and in the first verse of the Shema Yisrael prayer (Deut 6:4). From the point of view of Torah law, that pretty much sums up our obligatory beliefs. Our Sages came much later and formatted the other articles of faith that are founded in the Torah. While Torah faithful Jews are obligated to accept these principles and we do not consider one to be completely faithful to Torah unless they do, nonetheless, those not accepting one or more of those principles is not guilty of a law punishable in a Torah court of law.

As long as one is doing the right things, then his/her beliefs only blemish a higher world, but not our physical world. The penalties for blemishing a higher world are not something punishable in a physical human court. Blemishing higher worlds is crime that is punishable in a higher court, one in which we will all appear once we have passed away from this Earth. Yet, as long as we are here on Earth, we can each hold our dissenting views as long as they are within the confines of Torah law and as long as they do not promote violations of said Torah laws.

We are obligated to observe the Shabat. There are many laws with regards to this. A Torah faithful Jew must learn all these laws, learn them well and practice them all in order to properly bring rectification to our World of Asiyah. The reasons why many laws were ordained may not make the best sense for people living in our days. Nonetheless, regardless of whatever you think you understand about obeying the laws, the laws must still be observed in full. Action counts and talk is cheap. Believe what you want but do what you must.

The Shabat laws like the laws of the Tabernacle are interconnected in more ways than one. Not only do we learn from the activities associated with the building of the Tabernacle which activities are prohibited on Shabat, we can also learn a deeper lesson. Just as the Tabernacle created a communications system between Heaven and Earth, so too does the proper observance of the Shabat calibrate the Jewish soul to a fine resonance enabling it to receive Divine communion.

Doing the right things is always essential; it is, after all, the law. What we do not see is that the right things that we do have a reverberatory affect upon higher worlds. These in turn have an effect upon our physical world. I am not talking about anything mystical here. I am merely explaining the psychology underlying the observance of mitzvot.

When one accepts the belief that G-d gave us the Shabat and has commanded us by law to honor and observe it in a specific way, these thoughts connect us to a much deeper understanding of the Shabat than if we just did what we do by rote without any deeper attachment. Although we are not obligated

by Torah law to have a deeper relationship with the Shabat more than its ritual observance, still, those who take this extra step are rewarded with a brilliant enlightenment that I do not know if words can properly define.

The Shabat connects the Jewish soul to Heaven in a way similar to the connection made possible through the Ark and the High Priest. The very action of Shabat observance has an effect upon the Jewish soul. It calms the soul and restores its natural connection to both Heaven and the Earth. Indeed, the observance of the Shabat according to its laws creates the psychological balance that restores mental sanity and clarity. The physical prohibitions actually settle both the body and soul enabling both to realign the necessary balance between Heaven and Earth.

Rituals do have their reasons. Their positive benefits are physical and psychological. When we do the right things, the right things get done. It does not matter whether or not you believe in them, you do them just the same. Then a miracle occurs, what you did once without belief becomes transformed. You begin to see the wisdom in them. Your mind becomes sharp and what once was confusing now becomes clear. You then continue to do what is right with full conviction and belief. Your actions rectify this physical world and your transformed beliefs rectify the higher worlds. Together Heaven and Earth are balanced and we bring peace to our world as a result.

It is no wonder then that our Sages have taught that if all Israel were to properly observe the Shabat twice in a row, then Mashiah would automatically come. This is not some magical recipe. This is a statement of psychological reality. If all Israel were to jointly rise to the occasion of higher consciousness in recognizing the Heavenly portion of the Shabat contained within its ritual observances and repeats this even only once, the resulting balance would restore complete harmony between Heaven and Earth. Mashiah would thus come.

Again, this is not magical, this is psychological. The change first occurs within. When we change what is within, we can change everything else on the outside. Here is the irony; we begin the internal change by first changing the external outside. We begin by following the ritual laws of Shabat. These in turn change our consciousness. Our consciousness in turn changes the way we look at reality. Our new outlook on reality makes us act differently and better, thus bringing our world into a much higher state.

This is how we can bring Mashiah and it all starts by what we do, even if done without belief (or for the wrong reason). Do what is right even for the wrong reasons and what is right will eventually be done for the right reasons. This is the truth of the mind and the way of rectifying the world.