

The double command...

Vayakhel 5782/2022

At the beginning of Parashat Vayakhel we see Moses gather the Jewish people telling them that 'these are the things that God has commanded you to do'. He then seems to go on a tangent and remind the Jewish people about Shabbat, only to come back a second time and say 'this is what God has commanded'.¹

The Torah doesn't mince words, so we have to understand what the double command represents, and why Moses decided to go on a tangent, especially because in last week's Parasha we already received a reminder about Shabbat.

The Ramban tells us that this double command and the Shabbat tangent teaches us that the work pertaining to the construction of the Mishkan does not override Shabbat². The establishment of halakhic categories of work that is forbidden on Shabbat is derived from this idea³.

The double command therefore has its place – we are commanded, then reminded about Shabbat, and then commanded again, to ensure that we understand that the commandment to create should never get in the way of the commandment to rest.

Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch explains this at a more philosophical level. While the Mishkan is holy, and will become God's home, thus making this form of human labour holy, Shabbat is inherently holy and marked by God's cessation of labour. It always maintains superiority, and our own cessation of labour is an allegiance to God⁴.

In other words, if one created the Mishkan while neglecting Shabbat, what has occurred? A complete negation of one's relationship with God, and with Godliness itself. These acts of creation are not only sacrilegious, but actually interrupt the direct relationship between a person and the Almighty.

The oft-stated saying of Ahad Haam "More than the Jewish People have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews" is true, not because of Shabbat's natural ability to create community and continuity, but because it provides the space for us to greet God, commune with God, form a relationship with God, and provide space to hear the double command and all other commands.

All citations can be found in **A New Page of Talmud**