

# **THE SABBATH: TO REMEMBER, TO OBSERVE, TO MAKE**

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One distinction between the Book of Deuteronomy and the other four books of the Torah is reflected in the two different versions of the Decalogue, in Exodus 20:1-14, and in Deuteronomy 5:6-18.

First of all, we note that the version in Exodus is presented as God's word: *And God spoke all these words, saying* (Ex. 20:1); and *all the people saw the voices, and the thunderings* (20:18). In contrast, after the 40 years in the desert, Moses addresses an entirely new generation, and explains (Deut. 1:5) the previous revelations, commandments, and so forth (Deut. 1:5). Quite in line with this, Chapter 5 of Deuteronomy, which records the Decalogue, plainly says in its opening verse: *And Moses called all Israel and said unto them . . .* (v. 1). That is, Moses expounds here the Word of God revealed 40 years earlier. In regard to the sabbath, for example, the Decalogue version in the Book of Exodus says *Remember* [zachor] *the sabbath day* (20:8), while the version in the Book of Deuteronomy says *Observe* [shamor] *the sabbath day* (5:12).

Deuteronomy also contains a most significant statement: *therefore the Lord Thy God has commanded you to make* [la'asot] *the day of the sabbath* (5:15). It is my contention that the term "to make" has special implications, and thus differs from *shamor* [to observe, to keep] as will be detailed later on.

## TO REMEMBER

Forty years earlier, at the revelation on Mount Sinai, the children of Israel were commanded to *remember the sabbath day*. What was there in the past to remember? The sabbath was not introduced as a novelty. It was already known to the people of Israel, as evidenced in the episode of the manna:

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*Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, the sabbath, in it shall be none. And it came to pass that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. And the Lord said unto Moses, 'How long refuse you to keep My commandments and My laws?'* (Ex. 16:26-28).

Indeed, the tradition of *keeping My commandments and My laws* of observing the sabbath must have derived at least from Abraham, of whom it is said in words similar to the narration of the manna: *'he obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws'* (Gen. 26:5).

Let us note further in this context that the seventh day of the week as the sabbath is instituted entirely on its own, without any connection to heavenly bodies, in contrast to the calculation of months and years which we derive from the moon and sun cycles.

The formulation in Exodus 20:8-11 of the Fourth Commandment seems to give a universal, even cosmological, reason for observing the seventh day: *for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.*

Clearly, this version differs sharply from the record of Creation in Genesis 1. There, the six days of Creation are attributed to Elohim (personifying the aspect of the laws of nature, of severity, of judgment), while in the Decalogue, the Lord's Name – the Tetragrammaton – is mentioned (expressing the aspects of grace, mercy, forgiveness, and so forth – the 13 attributes, cf. Exodus 34:6)).

Furthermore, the following question can be raised: Why is the commandment in Exodus 20:4 that slaves and cattle, too, should rest on the seventh day, connected to the statement of the making of heavens and earth and sea in six days in verse 11? Evidently, the inclusion of slaves and cattle reminds us that they, too, are part of that Creation whose Creator rested, even blessed, the seventh day. As man is appointed to subdue the earth and the animals, he ought to do so like a patron created in the image of that Creator. On the way to independence in Canaan, Israel is reminded of her responsibility, as a *Kingdom of Priests* (Ex. 19:6) in which position she serves all mankind.

## TO OBSERVE

In comparison, the formulation of the commandment in Deuteronomy is obviously a down-to-earth instruction. Here, the text on the sabbath includes the following reminder: *Remember that you were a slave in Egypt* (Deut. 5:14), a lesson for mankind to learn from the bitter experience of slavery from which Israel had been liberated. "By ceasing from toil one day in seven, they would distinguish their work from slavery. And in their new life in the Promised Land they were to avoid imposing upon others what had been so bitter to them"<sup>1</sup>

When expounding now the earlier revelations, Moses realized that he had to prepare a new generation for their settlement in the Land. Most of them had been born in the desert. They would soon change their position from that of having been children of slaves, fugitives, and desert nomads, to that of becoming landlords and masters. Very naturally, at this crucial point Moses warns them now in stronger words than those recorded in Exodus 20:5-12 of the pitfalls inherent in that change of status.

Thus, Deuteronomy 5:12 does more than address Israel and its actual work (service) in its country. The Exodus from Egypt mentioned here constitutes in itself an act of creation, namely the establishing of Divine freedom on a nation-wide scale, first for Israel and eventually for mankind altogether.

This then may also explain the differences between *remember* [*zachor*] in the Exodus version of the Decalogue; and *observe* [*shamor*] in the Deuteronomy version of the Decalogue. While in English, the word *remember* means to get all the disconnected members of our memory together again, the Hebrew *zachor* means actually to penetrate through the darkness of forgetfulness into the original, back to the origin, to the beginning, in order to establish the sabbath on earth. *Shamor*, observing the sabbath day, tells Israel to put this remembrance into practice, especially after the experience of liberation from the bondage of Egypt and in view of Israel's settling in the land.

The rest of the differences in the version of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy from that in Exodus are quite in line therewith, even very pointedly so. In Deuteronomy, after *Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it*, the words *as the Lord Thy God has commanded thee* are added. Israel was indeed already commanded to keep the sabbath (Ex. 31:14-16), but obviously relying on the version in Exodus, the hope was expressed by the prophets that the nations

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will eventually, in future, do so: *From one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord* (Isa. 66:23).

### TO MAKE THE SABBATH

As mentioned, Israel is commanded to *make the sabbath to sanctify it*. Significantly enough, the word "make [*aseh*]" already appears in the story of the creation of Adam: *and God spoke, let us make [naaseh] Adam in our image as our likeness, . . . and God created Adam [Man] in His image, in the image of God He created him* (Gen. 1:26,27).

While verse 26 speaks of the Divine plan to make Adam in God's image and likeness, verse 27 speaks of the actual creation of Adam in God's image. There, the term *likeness* is omitted, intentionally. This omission tells us that Adam (Man, Mankind) should develop from the status of earthly man towards receiving the Divine Light. The continuous process of forming him, that is of truly Man-making, leads him eventually to imitating the spiritual likeness of his Creator.

We may compare this process to that of our own natural growth. A baby emerging from the womb is perfect, but is not yet a professor, sage, or head of a family. It must grow up to its destiny, both in its physical growth and its spiritual development, or, as the prophets say, to the knowledge of the Lord. In this growth process, like all children, we need to have our own experiences. Sometimes we must even be unyielding toward our parents in order to prove and establish ourselves, until we fulfill our destiny; that is, until we find our peace and rest in God.<sup>2</sup>

Man's destiny to develop from a "natural state" towards God's likeness as expressed in the 13 Attributes is born out in the summing up of the story of Creation: *And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, for He rested from all His work which He created to make* (Gen. 2:3). This *making* of the sabbath, as mentioned, is an essential part thereof.

Thus, the story of Creation postulates:

- \*our created nature (created in God's *image*);
- \*our call (*let us make Adam . . . as our likeness*);
- \*the path towards realizing our "second nature" in the likeness of the 13 attributes *which God created to make*
- \* the seventh day and its special blessing.

In fact, observing the sabbath and making the sabbath are complementary: *and the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath to make the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant* (Ex. 31:16). The sabbath was not created; that is, the sabbath is not imposed – neither upon nature nor upon man – as an unbreakable law of Creation. Rather, it is a Divine gift instituted for our benefit and for our growth towards being in His likeness. As such, it is part of the *Matan Torah*, the "Giving [a permanently ongoing gift] of the Torah." It being a gift, we can appreciate it, or can reject it (and bear the consequence thereof). Receiving this gift depends on our *making* the sabbath day: It is the peculiar way of *making* that confers sanctification with its special and elevating atmosphere at home, in town, and country. Apparently it is for this reason that Exodus 31:16 enjoins: *And the children of Israel shall observe [keep] the sabbath to make the sabbath*. Without that special "making," the sabbath repose would not be different from a lull or a rest at night. Moses, in Deuteronomy 5:12, simply refers back to what Israel was told in Exodus 31:16.

Thus, making the sabbath is an essential ingredient in our "Man-making," and is a sign of the Covenant. To understand this, we have only to realize that the sabbath has perhaps been the greatest social revolution in the history of mankind. If practiced, this commandment obliterates the "rights" of the slaveholders in whatever garb they appear, to push their slaves, laborers, even animals, to incessant work like machines. It also grants these so-called working-class people the status of decent human beings; and animals, subdued to man, creatures of God, share in it. Even the construction work for building the Sanctuary were subordinate to the sabbath rules and the latter prevail. Regarding Israel, keeping the sabbath is also reciprocal: "More than Israel kept the sabbath, the sabbath has kept Israel." Yet, the sabbath commandment is not absolute; it gives way as necessary to save life.

#### CONCLUSION

Summing up, we may say that Exodus 20:8-11 reflects the Divine constitution of the sabbath commandment and its eventual relevance for all mankind, while Deuteronomy 5:12-15 specifies it and concentrates on its implementation by Israel.

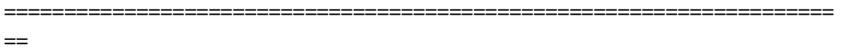
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The understanding that the Decalogue in the Book of Exodus reflects cosmological order, while the version in the Book of Deuteronomy was given to Israel especially in view of the settling of the people of Israel in the Land of the Covenant may well find support in the Midrash (Shemot Rabba 46:1). Here the Lord says to Moses: "Don't regret [the breaking of] the first tablets, which were in any case only the Ten Words; the second tablets I give thee will comprise *halakhot*, *midrash*, and *aggadot* [rules of life, expounding, and tales]," including the specific sabbath ordinances.

In Hebrew, the two terms *remember* and *observe* are pronounced and written in the infinitive form, not in the imperative, and thus do not call for an occasional observance, or occasional remembrance of some past events.<sup>3</sup> Both terms refer to the eternal Divine institution of the sabbath and its Divine blessing, from the days of Creation to the Divine Covenant and to Israel's destiny for all future time.

NOTES:

1. *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, Commentary by Dr. Joseph Herman Hertz (London: Soncino, 1972).
2. In Hebrew, the words for answering, returning, resting, and sabbath all derive from the same root word *shav*. This means to say that our answer to God's eternal question to Adam (Man): *Where are you?*, should be our return to his rest; that is, the sabbath.
3. It is for this reason that we speak of *Matan Torah*, the [eternal] Giving of the Torah, and say in the blessing after reading the Torah "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Giver of the Torah."



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