

Parashat Emor 5783, 2023:

*Shabbat and the Mo'adim*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon HaKohane, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechezkel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Gittel Malka bat Moshe, Alexander Leib ben Benyamin Yosef, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Chapter 23 of our *parasha* is popularly known as *parashat hamoadim*. In its introductory verses we find:

And Hashem spoke to Moses, saying: “Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: ‘[These are] Hashem’s appointed [holy days] that you shall designate as holy occasions (*mikra’ei kodesh*). These are My appointed [holy days].’” (These and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Based on these *pasukim*, we would expect that the very next verse should focus on Pesach, the first of the *mikra’ei kodesh*. This, however, is not the case: “[For] six days, work may be performed, but on the seventh day, it is a complete rest day, a holy occasion; you shall not perform any work. It is a Sabbath to Hashem in all your dwelling places.” On the surface, this *pasuk* certainly seems to be out of place, since unlike the *mo’adim* Shabbat is sanctified by Hashem. As we find in a celebrated passage in Parashat Bereishit:

Now the heavens and the earth were completed and all their host. And *Elokim* completed on the seventh day His work that He did, and He abstained on the seventh day from all His work that He did. And *Elokim* blessed the seventh day, and He hallowed it, for thereon He abstained from all His work that *Elokim* created to do. (2:1-3, underlining my own)

A number of Torah commentators have addressed this problem. Rashi (1040-1105), based upon the *Sifra*, the halachic midrash to *Sefer Vayikra*, explains the placement of Shabbat at the beginning of the presentation of the *mo’adim* in this manner:

Why does the Sabbath [designated by G-d,] appear here amidst the festivals? To teach you that whoever desecrates the festivals is considered [to have transgressed as severely] as if he had desecrated the Sabbath, and that whoever fulfills the festivals is considered as if he has fulfilled the Sabbath, [and his reward is as great].

In sum, Rashi presents the classic opinion that, in a very significant way, the *mo’adim* are equivalent to

Shabbat, even though it is man, rather than Hashem, who designates their actual calendrical dates.

Rabbi Ya'akov Kamenetsky *zatzal* (1891-1986) takes a different approach in his answer to the question, “Why does the Sabbath appear amidst the festivals?”

It appears to me that all nations and ethnicities have their different festivals and appointed times. Given that this is the case, in order to prevent us from erring and thinking that our festivals are no different in kind or degree from those of the other nations of the world, the Torah begins with the notion that without the Shabbat there would be no importance whatsoever to the *mo'adim*. The reason for this is eminently clear—for without the declaration of the holiness of Shabbat [by Hashem], no holiness would inhere in the *mo'adim*. (*Emet l'Yaakov*, Parashat Emor 23:2, translation and brackets my own)

According to Rav Kamenetsky, the holiness of Shabbat imbues the *mo'adim* with their singular status and holiness. True, the Jewish people declare the dates for the onset of the *mikra'ei kodesh*; yet their *kedushah* ultimately derives from Shabbat itself.

Rabbi Nissan Alpert *zatzal* (1928-1986) was one of the highly respected *roshei yeshivah* of Yeshivat Rabbi Yitzhak Elhanan and one of the greatest students of Rav Moshe Feinstein *zatzal* (1895-1986). In his posthumously published work of Torah analysis, *Limudei Nissan*, Rav Alpert presents an examination of Shabbat's connection to the *mo'adim* that at once parallels and expands upon Rav Kamenetsky's analysis:

[The reason why Shabbat appears in the midst of the festivals] is to emphasize that it is the **mother** of all the *mo'adim*, and the holiness of these [appointed] times flows from Shabbat. By way of explanation, this means that it is possible to extend the holiness of Shabbat to the other *mo'adim*. It is as if Hashem said, “I have sanctified the Shabbat, now, I give you [the Jewish people] the power and the permission to consecrate the rest of the appointed times.” Moreover, just as it is the purpose of the Shabbat to cease from the creative activities of the workweek through complete and total [spiritual] relaxation in order to draw near to Hashem, so, too, this should be our orientation on the other *yamim tovim*. In other words, our actions and behaviors on these days should be aimed at strengthening our faith and trust in Hashem. (Parashat Emor, page 50, s.v. *v'nireh li*, translation and brackets my own)

Rav Alpert's response focuses on several major points. He asserts that Shabbat appears in the midst of the festivals because it is the “mother” of the *mo'adim*. As such, the holiness of the *mikra'ei kodesh* flows directly from Shabbat and, just as Hashem consecrates Shabbat, we, too, are given the power and permission to sanctify the festivals. Lastly, he explains that the purpose of the *mo'adim* is similar in kind

to that of Shabbat, urging us to utilize the holy moments of both Shabbat and the festivals to strengthen our faith and trust in the Master of the Universe.

May we be *zocheh* to strengthen our *emunah* and *bitachon* in the Almighty as we honor Shabbat and rejoice on the *mo'adim*. *V'chane yih ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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Please contact me at [rdbe718@gmail.com](mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com) to be added to my weekly email list.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:

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\*\*\* I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav](#)