

PINCHAS (NUMBERS 25:10-30:1)

The REST of the Story

2003 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplovitz

This week's Torah Portion is the most commonly read section of the Torah.

The Torah Reading for Rosh Chodesh, the beginning of every month, is found in this Portion. Every day of Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, Simchas Torah, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur has a reading from this Portion. Each reading deals with that day's Temple offerings.

Additionally, these Torah selections have been incorporated into our daily, Sabbath, and holiday prayers.

In Temple times, there was a lamb offering that was roasted on the Altar every morning and every afternoon. (For a discussion of animal offerings, see "Where's the Beef?") On the Sabbath and all the above-mentioned holidays, there was a *Musaf*, an additional offering. Today our Temple, lying in ruins, is temporarily out of commission. Until the Temple is rebuilt, we will not be able to submit this offering to G-d. So how do we compensate for our current inability to fully comply with our obligations?

The Talmud tells us that when we can't bring a particular offering, we can accomplish the next best thing by reading the corresponding text. Since there is currently no *Korban Tamid*, Daily Offering, we are supposed to read the Torah text describing that offering, every morning and every afternoon, at the beginning of the Morning and Afternoon Services.

The Sabbath and each of the above-mentioned holidays has a *Musaf* Service, an additional set of prayers that must, for the time being, serve as the standby in place of the additional Temple service. In addition, during the Torah Reading segment of the service, we usually read the section from this week's Portion that discusses that day's *Musaf* offering.

As a result, we usually take out two Torah Scrolls on these holidays. First, there is a Torah reading that relates in some way to the holiday. The second reading is the *Musaf* segment, from this week's Portion. When Rosh Chodesh, the beginning of the month, occurs on the Sabbath, we read the regularly scheduled Torah Portion from the first Torah, and then the Musaf Offering for Rosh Chodesh from the second one.

In summary, every major holiday has a *Musaf* Service to commemorate the additional offering that was brought on that day. Each of those holidays also has a special additional Torah reading describing that offering.

With one exception. Shabbos.

Why is the Sabbath the only day with an additional service that has no additional reading? Why don't we take out two Torah scrolls, reading the weekly Portion from the first Torah, and the *Musaf* section from the second?

(The standard answer to this question is that we never read less than three verses from the Torah, and the Sabbath Mussaf reading (28:9-10) contains only two. However, that problem could be alleviated by simply reading an additional verse, something that we do every Rosh Chodesh.)

The Daas Zekainim, by the Baalei Tosafos, points out that the Sabbath Musaf is different from every other Musaf. Let us examine a few:

Passover: . . . *as atonement for you* . . . (Numbers, 28:22)

Shavuos: . . . *as atonement for you*. (28:30)

Rosh Hashanah: . . . *as atonement for you*. (29:5) Etc., etc.

Do you see a pattern yet? Every *Musaf* Service, with the exception of the Sabbath *Musaf*, serves (in part) as an atonement. G-d, in His love for His People, provides us with a means to re-enter His good graces by allowing us to be cleansed of our sins. Every holiday is a miniature Yom Kippur, allowing us to achieve a clean slate in our relationship with G-d.

Perhaps our additional reading of these portions serves to remind us that we still have to work on our relationship with G-d. Reading about offerings in the Temple serves as a temporary substitute for the real thing. It reminds us that the Temple still lies in ruins, desecrated by our enemies who seek to deny its sanctity and by foreign religious practices, and degraded by an accumulation of centuries' worth of trash (literally!!) that has been dumped on its holy site.

We have now entered the three-week period of mourning that culminates with Tisha B'Av, the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple. Our Sages tell us that the Second Temple was destroyed primarily because people didn't treat each other with respect, a sin that continues to this day. The constant reminder, on every holiday, that we still haven't seen the Temple rebuilt, should serve as a wake-up call that we still need to stop sinning against our neighbor.

In this respect, every holiday carries with it the "negative" message that we are not yet worthy of bringing the actual Musaf Service in the Temple. The Torah Reading serves to remind us that we still need an atonement.

Shabbos, on the other hand, is not about atonement. It is not used as an opportunity to remind us of our shortcomings. The Sabbath is, quite simply, a gift from G-d that allows us to rest and recharge our spiritual batteries. Unlike the other holidays, there is no reference to the sins of our People. There is no implied criticism of Israel.

The peaceful ambiance of the Sabbath is so pervasive that it overrides all negatives. A mourner takes a break from his seven-day Shivah period to enjoy the Sabbath. The fast of Tisha B'Av, the saddest day on our calendar, is postponed to the extent that we eat and drink to our heart's content on the Sabbath.

G-d put us in control of His world for six days per week. We, the "movers and shakers" of Creation, are given an opportunity to stop moving and shaking for a while. We can take some time to reflect on what life is REALLY all about. Family. Spirituality. Family. Study. Family. Synagogue. (Did I mention family?)

Isn't it sad that people look at the Sabbath from the outside and see nothing but a day of restrictions? "Why can't I drive?" "Why can't I use the telephone? You call THAT rest?!"

Consider this: When the phone rings, do you drop everything and run to answer it? If you miss the call, do you dial *69 to find out who it was? Do you carry two cell phones, a beeper, and a Palm Pilot with email so you are in constant contact 24/7/365?

If so, I have a question for you. Do you control your world, or does your world control you?

There is nothing as restful as knowing that the phone can ring off the hook, and simply not caring. One day a week, we get to turn off the outside world, and concentrate on the simple, beautiful concept of –

"Shabbat Shalom."

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