

MISHPATIM (EXODUS 21:1-24:18)

We Wish You a Merry Shabbos???

2008 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

Some Mitzvahs have “made it” into acceptance by the masses. Others seem to be reserved only for the “very religious.”

Certain commandments and certain violations are more “culturally correct” than others. Most Jews would never think of bowing down to a statue in a Buddhist temple or eating the limb of a living animal. Many, if not most, Jews eat Matzah on Passover.

Most Jews don’t check their clothes for Shaatnez (mixtures of linen and wool) or put on Tefillin. Most Jews don’t refrain from watching television on the Sabbath.

Sabbath observance is the “gold standard” of fidelity to Jewish Law. When measuring the extent of a Jew’s religiosity, we will often base our determination upon whether or not he is a “Shomer Shabbos.” It is preferable that a Minyan consist of ten men who observe the Sabbath. In order to be a valid witness in a Jewish court or in matters of Jewish status (marriage, divorce, etc.) one must be a Sabbath observer. Technically speaking, Sabbath violation is a capital crime. (See "A Capital Idea".)

Most of our People these days do not see Sabbath observance as imperative. They do not see Shabbos as the be-all and end-all of Jewish life. Naturally, idol worship is unthinkable to your average secular Jew. He would never knowingly articulate a blatant rejection of Judaism. At the same time, Shabbos is very far from his mind. He sees no connection between the two.

G-d disagrees:

Six days you will accomplish your activities, and on the seventh day you will rest...Be careful regarding everything I have said to you. Do not mention the names of strange gods, nor shall your mouth cause them to be heard. (Exodus, 23:12-13)

The juxtaposition of Sabbath and strange gods is no coincidence. The Talmud (Shabbos, 119) states that if a person properly observes the Sabbath, even if he worships idols, he will be forgiven. Conversely, a person who desecrates the Sabbath is considered comparable to an idol worshipper.

Isn’t that a bit of a stretch? Just because a Jew chooses not to be strictly observant of the Sabbath isn’t it a bit much to call him an idolater?

Yes, it is. The Torah is not calling him an idolater. Rather, it is pointing out a CONNECTION between the two transgressions.

Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin explains the connection. The Torah says “*on the seventh day you will rest ... Do not mention the names of strange gods...*” Rabbi Sorotzkin explains that IF “... *on the seventh day you will rest...*” you insure that you will*“... not mention the names of strange gods.”*

When a Jew refrains from working on Shabbos, he implants within himself a pure unadulterated faith in G-d. As a result, even if he has worshipped idols in the past, he will be inspired to return to G-d and repent his former ways.

Shabbos is the day when we show our belief in G-d as our Creator. He spent that first Sunday through Friday creating the world and then He rested on the Sabbath. He controls the world and determines how much success we will have during our own work week. We rest on the Sabbath to demonstrate our trust in Him.

On the other hand, we can see how Shabbos desecration can, in a sense, be compared to idol worship. If I choose to work on Saturday I am basically showing that I don't trust G-d to provide my needs. Is that really all that far from totally rejecting G-d and bowing down to His “competition”?

Rabbi Sorotzkin dealt with this concept in his own community. Synagogue attendance was on the decline due to the fact that a number of people in the community began to open their stores on Shabbos. One Shabbos, he walked into shul and found it to be packed. It was explained to him that the reason for the overflow of attendance was due to the fact that it was a non-Jewish holiday. Since stores were legally required to be closed, the otherwise-Sabbath violators took advantage of the opportunity to come to shul, along with their children.

Rabbi Sorotzkin was not one to “preach to the choir.” He took advantage of the presence of the Sabbath workers to tell them what they needed to hear.

“No doubt,” said the rabbi, “your children must have asked you, ‘Why is this Shabbos different from all the other Shabboses of the year?’

“And you must have answered, ‘This Shabbos is greater than every other Sabbath because today is the birthday of the founder of another religion.’

“Could there be a greater desecration of G-d's name?! The Torah warned us ‘*on the seventh day you will rest ... Do not mention the names of strange gods...*’ We must rest and guard it because of ‘... *everything I have said to you...*’ Don't associate the holiness of Shabbos with ‘*the names of strange gods... nor shall your mouth cause them to be heard.*’”

Rabbi Sorotzkin did not mention in his book as to whether or not any members of his community accepted his rebuke. But WE should.

Shabbos is our connection to G-d. Let's do it right.

Have a great Shabbos. Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

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