

In the *Parashios* of *Terumah*, *Tetzaveh*, and *Ki Tisa*, Gd instructed Moses regarding the building and consecration of the Tabernacle and the *Kohanim* that serve in it. At the conclusion of the long list of activities for the Tabernacle, Gd again commanded Moses regarding keeping the Sabbath, reiterating that which was said at Marah and after the splitting of the Reed Sea. Upon returning with the second set of tablets at the conclusion of the final 40 day period, Moses gathered the people and the first commandment he related from Gd is the last one he was given: keeping the Sabbath. Why did Moses reverse the order? Why not focus initially on the construction of the Tabernacle which represented the bulk of the time he spent on Mount Sinai?

The *Bais Halevi* explains that there are certain commandments that are fundamental to the survival of the Jewish people as a coherent people. On the other hand there are commandments that, while important, their absence does not negate our role as *Bnay Yisrael* or negatively influence our observance of the commandments. These commandments represent luxuries that while important, are not as essential to the functioning fabric of our people. Examples of the group of fundamental commandments are Sabbath, prayer and Jewish education. Without the Sabbath, the Jewish people simply could not survive. It provides the required regeneration and nourishment needed to maintain our spiritual existence. The corrosive, downward spiral of Torah and Mitzvah observance among American Jewry, is closely correlated with the decline in and lack of Sabbath observance on the part of American Jewry at large. Another example of a fundamental, core commandment is prayer. How would Judaism and the Jewish People survive without the concept and notion of prayer? We would have disappeared and assimilated long ago. And of course, the importance of Chinuch, Jewish Education, cannot be overstated.

On the other hand, there are commandments that one does not violate any negative law if he does not keep. We have commandments that obligate us to build a *Bays HaMikdash*. However, we do not violate any prohibitions by not fulfilling these positive commandments. Obviously we yearn for the rebuilding of the Temple speedily in our days. However, its absence has not condemned us to oblivion or the scrap heap of history. The proof for this is that we have survived for close to 2000 years without a Temple. Not only have we survived, to a certain degree we have thrived, despite all the devastating anguish we have endured throughout the millennia, as demonstrated by the generations of *Tanaim*, *Amoraim*, *Gaonim*, *Rishonim*, *Acharonim*, Kabbalists and Chasidic Masters who have contributed so

much to our understanding and practice of Judaism. Midrash (פסיקתא דרב כהנא כ) says (שה"ש ד:ג) ומדברך נאווה, we have reached great levels while we were in a desolate desert, without a Temple and exiled from our land. In certain areas, we exceeded what we accomplished during the Temple periods. Indeed, the presence of the Temple was no guarantee of Mitzvah observance, as various Prophets documented the extreme transgressions and desecrations of Judaism committed by various kings and the people at various points in the first commonwealth.

The order of *Mitzvah* presentation by Moses coincided with the state of mind of the people. A sane person recognizes that he has to interact with people in a normal, rational way. He instinctively takes care of his core needs, such as personal health, without outside prompting, allowing him to focus on the more intricate and luxurious aspects of life. On the other hand, a person who starts to slide towards irrational behavior or insanity loses recognition and contact with the simple, normal things. The deranged individual must be reminded to take care of himself, to eat, to dress appropriately. Prior to the episode of the golden calf, the Jewish People exhibited normal behavior. There was no need to remind them to do something as core and basic as keeping the Sabbath. Observance should have been a natural subconscious act.

We find that the issues of the time that drew rebukes and lectures by *Gdolei Yisrael* like the *Noda B'Yehuda* or the *Chasam Sofer* involved important but relatively insignificant issues, such as pursuit of fancy clothing, jewelry, use of mirrors, or dedicating more time to studying Torah, in other words, luxury items. They never had to lecture their communities about core principles like Sabbath or prayer.

A sane nation needs to be told about higher type luxuries like the Tabernacle, how to maintain it, how to perform the daily service and to offer sacrifices. It does not need constant reminders about core pre-requisites like the Sabbath. At the end of the instructions on the Tabernacle, i.e. luxury commandments, Gd told Moses to make sure they don't lose focus on the Sabbath when they build the Tabernacle. When they constructed the golden calf they became insane, their value system became perverted. What was most important became insignificant, while the insignificant assumed new prominence.

A sane person would employ his wealth to ensure that his children have the best possible Jewish Education. Spending on luxuries like expensive clothing or homes should be the last thing pursued in order to ensure proper focus on implementing the real priorities. After the golden calf episode and their associated insanity, Moses realized that there was no use to instruct them about the Tabernacle if they

lost sight of the Sabbath. It is pure insanity to desecrate the Sabbath to earn a meager profit and donate major sums to a temple. This sign of insanity applied in the times of Moses as well today. Moses realized that he needed to restore their sanity, and the first step in that direction was to reiterate the importance of the Sabbath.

In America, another example of misplaced emphasis is the focus placed on reciting Kaddish. While it is a very important and praiseworthy act that demonstrates respect for one's parents, it is not as important as Sabbath or Jewish Education. The blessing of בורא נפשות רבות initially thanks Gd for the basics and only afterwards do we thank Him for the luxury items we have. Emphasis on the core set of commandments that are truly essential for the continuity of the Jewish Nation is an important lesson in maintaining a sane Jewish Life. Only then can we look to take on additional responsibilities.

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