

Shabbat as Part of Judaism's Overall Dialectic

Rabbi Yaakov Bieler
Parashat Emor

Various references to Shabbat within the Tora.

"Shabbat" appears in every book of the Tora,¹ and prior to Parashat Emor in VaYikra, where we read the following,

VaYikra 23:3

Six days you shall do creative activity, and on the **seventh day "Shabbat Shabbaton"**, a holy convocation, all creative activity you shall not do. It is **Shabbat** to HaShem in all of your dwellings,

we have already been told about "Shabbat" several times:

Beraishit 2:3

And God Blessed the **seventh day** and Sanctified it because in it He Rested from all of His Creative Activity that God Created to do.

Shemot 16:23

And he (Moshe) said to them: This is what HaShem has Spoken, **Shabbaton** (a rest day), a holy **Shabbat** for HaShem tomorrow. What you want to bake, bake (today) and what you want to cook, cook (today), and whatever is left over (from the double portion of Manna that will fall on Fridays) put away for yourselves as a safekeeping until the morning.

Shemot 20:8-11

Remember the **Shabbat** day to keep it holy. Six days you will work and do all of your creative activity. And on the **seventh day** a **Shabbat** to the Lord your God, you shall not do any creative activity, you, your son, your daughter, your male servant, your female servant, and your animal and your sojourner that is in your gates. Because for six days did HaShem Make the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in it, and He Rested on the **seventh day**. For this reason HaShem Blessed the day of the **Shabbat** and He Sanctified it.

Shemot 23:12

¹ In addition to the reference in Parashat Emor, Shabbat is also mentioned later in the Tora in BaMidbar 15:32-36; 28:9; and Devarim 5:12-15. It could be contended that BaMidbar 15, the story of the wood gatherer on Shabbat does not involve new aspects of the Mitzva, but rather an illustration of its application and enforcement., BaMidbar 28 describes the type of special sacrifice offered in the Tabernacle/Temple each Shabbat, but does not address the manner in which Shabbat is to be observed in general. And as for Devarim 5, this is no more than a relatively faithful restatement of the Ten Commandments. Although with respect to Shabbat, the reason given for the Mitzva in Devarim differs from the version in Shemot 20 (the reason in Shemot is that we rest in order to emulate God's Resting following Creation; the reason in Devarim is to remind the Jews of their plight when they were slaves in Egypt), nevertheless, from a practical point of view, nothing new in terms of the manner in which Shabbat is to be observed appears to be conveyed. Consequently, we could argue that the passage in Emor is the last when a new form of the Mitzva to observe Shabbat is being presented by the Tora.

Six days you will do your activities and on the **seventh day** you will rest, in order that your ox and your donkey will rest and the son of your handmaiden and the sojourner will rest.

Shemot 31:13-17

You (Moshe) shall speak to the Jewish people saying: You will certainly observe My **Shabbatot** because it is a sign between Me and between you for your generations, to know that I am HaShem Who Sanctifies you. And you will observe **Shabbat** because it is holy to you; those who profane it will surely die, because anyone who performs in it creative activity and that soul will be cut off from the midst of its people. Six days will creative activity be done, and on the **seventh day Shabbat Shabbaton** holy to HaShem. Whoever does creative activity on the day of **Shabbat** will surely die. And the Children of Israel will observe the **Shabbat**, to do **Shabbat** down through their generations, an eternal covenant. Between Me and the Children of Israel it is a sign forever, because in six days HaShem Made the Heavens and the earth and on the **seventh day** He Rested.

Shemot 34:21

Six days you shall work and on the **seventh day** you shall rest, you will rest from ploughing and harvesting.

Shemot 35:2-3

Six days will creative activity be done, and on the **seventh day** it will be to you holy, **Shabbat Shabbaton** to HaShem. Whoever does creative activity in it, will die. You shall not ignite a fire in all of your habitations on the day of **Shabbat**.

VaYikra 19:3

An individual should fear his mother and his father and My **Shabbatot** he should observe, I am HaShem.

VaYikra 19:30

My **Shabbatot** you shall observe, and My Tabernacle/Temple you shall fear, I am HaShem.

Accounting for these numerous references to Shabbat.

While it is conceivable that the reason for the many repetitions of this Commandment is in order to emphasize its centrality and importance in comparison with other Mitzvot,² some commentators attempt to attribute to each new iteration of Shabbat a specific intent and emphasis, in order to avoid the impression of the Tora containing simple superfluity.

Rabbi S.R. Hirsch on VaYikra 23:3

² Tosafot on Kiddushin 70b, d.h. “Kashim Geirim” notes that the Tora states in 24 (alternate readings substitute “36” or “46” for this number) places that one is not to oppress Geirim (lit. sojourners; in this context, converts to Judaism). From such repeated insistence it can be inferred that observing this Mitzva is simultaneously important and challenging—if it were so easy to comply with this directive, why does it have to be revisited again and again? By implication, a similar conclusion could be reached regarding the observance of Shabbat.

...The “Shabbat” law appears repeatedly in the Tora, and always with reference to a **different phase of Jewish life**, to which indeed **Shabbat forms the fundamental institution**. Thus we find:

- a) the Shabbat of Creation (Gen. 2:1);
- b) the Shabbat of the Wilderness, in connection with the struggle for existence, for obtaining food (Shem. 16:22);
- c) the Shabbat of the Decalogue, as evidence of the whole Jewish consciousness of God (Shem. 20:8);
- d) Shabbat re its effect on human and social life (Shem. 23:12);
- e) the sanctity of Shabbat in its relationship to the Temple (Shem. 31:13 ff.; 35:2 ff.)

Linking a comment in Parashat Emor to one in Parashat BeShalach.

R. Hirsch’s explanation for the Tora’s repetition of the Mitzva of Shabbat is intriguing on at least two counts. Firstly, he contends that Shabbat is “the fundamental institution of Jewish life.” This premise is reflected in earlier comments that R. Hirsch makes regarding the double portion of Manna that fell in the desert on Erev Shabbat (the day preceding Shabbat, i.e., Friday), in order to compensate for Manna’s not being found at the outskirts of the encampment on Shabbat itself. The commentator wishes to explain why HaShem Wished that the people “stay at home” on Shabbat, rather than going out to gather food as they had to do on the other days of the week.

Rabbi S.R. Hirsch on Shemot 16:23

...In inhibiting his activity—Shabbaton³—the Jew is first of all to show his **submission to God in his activity in seeking his livelihood** (gathering the Manna was the means by which the Jews acquired their requisite food during the 40 years of wandering in the desert, hence how they sought their “livelihood” during that period of time)—that first and mightiest incitement to conquer the world,⁴ and just as the Shabbat of God

³ R. Hirsch’s focusing upon the term Shabbaton is given particular resonance in light of RaMBaN’s comments on VaYikra 23:24, partially cited in fn. 8 below, where the medieval commentator defines this word as representing the positive Commandment that is fulfilled on Shabbat by not doing Melacha.

⁴ R. Hirsch’s terminology with regard to man’s mandate to conquer the world stems from one of the blessings Bestowed by God upon Adam and Chava:

Beraishit 1:28

And God Blessed them and He Said to them: Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth **and conquer it**, and **rule** over the fish of the sea and over the bird of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Although following the Flood, man is given permission to rule over animal life to the point where even its consumption as food becomes possible,

Beraishit 9:3

Every moving thing that lives, it will be food for you, like the green grass I have Given to you everything, at the time of Beraishit 1:28, only plant life was permitted to be eaten. Consequently, R. Hirsch had to originally define “conquest” in a more limited manner, than what it eventually could be interpreted to connote:

Rabbi S.R. Hirsch on Beraishit 1:28

“Kivshuha” (and conquer it) is property: the mastering, appropriating and transforming the earth and its products for human purposes (short of treating animal life as food). This acquirement of property is a preliminary necessity for the preceding tasks of home and society which require it as the means for accomplishing them. This makes the acquisition of property itself into a moral duty. But as this preliminary duty is mentioned last (“Peru” [be fruitful] = marriage; “Revu” [multiply] = children, family; “Milu” [fill] = society) it gives it its limitation as having a moral meaning and importance only if it is

impresses the seal of God's Creation on the world,⁵ so does the **Shabbat of man impress the seal of the authority of God on Man's efforts at creation.**⁶ With Shabbat, man places himself and his work in the service of God⁷...

The greater implications of not performing Melacha one day each week.

According to R. Hirsch, the reason why Shabbat is the fundamental institution of Jewish life independent of the specific conditions in which Jews find themselves down through the ages, is because its observance in terms of the willing cessation by a Jew of the pursuit of his livelihood⁸ demonstrates an

devoted to the preceding purposes; only if fortune is sought and acquired to found family and further the needs of social work. But not if the order is reversed and one looks upon marriage and society as the means to acquire property and riches.

⁵ By God Deciding that the Creation was completed, and therefore an entire "day" was set aside during which no further creation of aspects of the universe would occur, He Demonstrates that rather than simply Setting into motion the forces of Nature, He Maintains control over them to the extent that He Decides when to initiate their functioning and the consequent progress of Creation, and when to call a halt to them.

⁶ Rather than man deciding when to engage in his own creative acts, which serve as a microcosm of God's Creating the universe, he defers to God's Schedule and Commandments, also calling a weekly halt to his activities.

⁷ Although in a finite sense, observing Shabbat only incorporates adherence to God's Directives with respect to activities which a person might engage in during the 24+ hour period between Friday evening and Saturday night, R. Hirsch suggests that it symbolizes man's acceptance of God's Authority vis-a-vis his activities during the other six days of the week as well. Consequently, it becomes the most overarching statement of man's readiness to subject himself to God's Law and Will.

⁸ It is interesting that R. Hirsch understands the significance of Shabbat with regard to what he considers its centrality in Jewish life from the negative rather than positive perspective, i.e., more important than the positive aspects of Shabbat observance, e.g., Kiddush, Seudot (festive meals), Zemirot (songs of praise), Neirot (lit candles), Tefilla (prayer) etc., is the prohibition against performing creative activity. And although the considerable sacrifice entailed in desisting from one's profession or occupation for an entire day each week is certainly obvious, from another perspective a case could be made that Mitzvot Aseh (positive Commandments) trump Mitzvot Lo Ta'aseh (negative Commandments) in terms of their respective spiritual significance. One commentator makes such a claim in his presentation of the Commandment of Shabbat:

RaMBaN on Shemot 20:8

...It is also true that the attribute of Zachor (remembering; this is the language that is used in the first version of the Ten Commandments in Shemot 20:8) is represented by a positive Commandment ("remembering" suggests positive pro-action rather than avoidance of objectionable action implied by "guard against") and issues forth from the emotion of love extending to the attribute of mercy, for he who does his master's command is beloved by him and his master shows him mercy. But the attribute of Shamor (observing, Devarim 5:12) is represented by a negative Commandment, which extends to the attribute of justice and issues forth from the emotion of fear, for he who guards himself from doing anything which does not please his master does so out of fear of him. It is for this reason that a positive Commandment is greater than a negative Commandment, just as love is greater than fear, for he who fulfills and observes the will of his master with his body and his possessions is greater than he who guards himself from doing that which is not pleasing to him. This is why the Rabbis have said (Shabbat 132b, etc.) that a positive Commandment overrides a negative Commandment (when both are inherent in the same action—a classic example discussed in Yevamot 4b is the reason why the Commandment of not wearing Sha'atnez [mixtures of wool and linen] is placed immediately next to the Command to wear Tzitzit [Devarim 22:12-13]. The Talmud suggests that the juxtaposition [Semichut HaParshiot] of these two Commandments comes to teach that in the event that one has a linen four-cornered garment and woolen fringes, one can attach the fringes to the garment despite the prohibition against Sha'atnez since the positive Commandment of wearing Tzitzit overpowers the negative Commandment of avoiding Sha'atnez)...

individual's devotion to and sacrifice for God playing a more central role in his life than any consideration of personal advancement or fulfillment.

Shabbat as a manifestation of sacrifice.

The centrality of sacrifice and self-discipline as a means by which one indicates the degree to which he is beholden to God and His Tora, is a theme that R. J.B. Soloveitchik, ZaTzaL, often invoked in his writing. However, he sees the cessation of pro-active creative activity as only one side of a two-sided coin with regard to God's Expectations of man:

R. J.B. Soloveitchik, "Catharsis" in Tradition, 17:2, 1978.

...What is heroism in the Halacha?

...One must perform the dialectical⁹ movement. The Halachic catharsis expresses itself in paradoxical movement in two opposite directions—in surging forward boldly and

Extending RaMBaN's understanding of the spiritual significance of positive as opposed to negative Commandments to the Mitzva of Shabbat, one would then conclude that it is not the avoidance of Melacha, i.e., the negative aspect of Shabbat, that is key, but rather all of the positive actions that are associated with Shabbat that contain Shabbat's true spiritual meaning.

Perhaps R. Hirsch would respond that the negative Commandment of Shamor that is associated with Shabbat is intrinsically different from other negative Commandments designed to separate a Jew from particular objects or activities. Whereas one could contend that non-Kosher foods might have something about them that is at least metaphysically objectionable, and that the act of stealing another's property is inherently an evil act, performing Melacha in the pursuit of one's livelihood is not only devoid of such negative connotations, but is even a Mitzva, i.e., a religiously positive act, most of the time—the Tora's statements to the effect that "Six days you shall work, perform creative activity" (see the verses dealing with "Shabbat" cited at the beginning of this essay) could be viewed not only as the granting of permission to engage in productive labor, but as a Commandment to do so! Therefore when one is told to cease doing Melacha on Shabbat, it is not so much to separate from something evil, as to create the context whereby the positive Commandments of Shabbat can be performed that much more fully and meaningfully. Furthermore, not performing Melacha on Shabbat is viewed by RaMBaN as being interdicted by both a negative as well as a positive Commandment.

RaMBaN on VaYikra 23:24 (The commentator is accounting for the usage in the verse of "Shabbaton" by itself, as opposed to the more typical "Shabbat Shabbaton".)

That it will be a day of cessation of Melacha to rest in it. And the Rabbis interpret (Shabbat 24a):

"'Shabbaton' is a positive Commandment." And behold a person who performs "Melacha" on "Yom Tov" transgresses a negative Commandment as well as fails to fulfill a positive Commandment. And one who rests on it, fulfills a positive Commandment...

Although RaMBaN is commenting above on a verse that deals with Rosh HaShana, his citation of Shabbat 24a, combined with the term "Shabbaton" appearing in verses that concern Shabbat rather than Yom Tov (see Shemot 16:23; 31:15; 35:2) allow one to understand resting on Shabbat as also the fulfillment of both types of Commandments. Whenever a Mitzva manifests itself in both positive and negative forms, it is an indication of its centrality and significance.

Naturally there is an element of paradox when one conceptualizes the absence of action as not only compliance with instructions to desist from action, but also as a "positive fulfillment" of some kind. With respect to Shabbat, we confront an instance of a Mitzvat Aseh that is accomplished by doing nothing! Nevertheless, such a definition allows us to avoid pitting the prohibition against doing Melacha against the obligation to make Kiddush, light candles, etc. and rather see it as a complete entity in itself, encompassing both positive and negative elements simultaneously.

⁹ "Dialectic"—...the method of logic used by Hegel and adapted by Marx to his materialist philosophy; it is based on the concept of the contradiction of opposites (thesis and antithesis) and their continual resolution using dialectic. (Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition, The World Publishing Co., Cleveland, 1966, p. 404.)

retreating humbly. Man's heroic experience is a polar, antithetic one. Man drives forward, only to retreat and to reverse, subsequently, the direction of his movement.

The Tora wants man who is bold and adventurous in his quest for opportunities, to act heroically, and at the final moment, when it appears that victory is within reach, to stop short, turn around and retreat. At the most exalted moment of triumph and fulfillment, man must forego the ecstasy of victory and take defeat at his own hands...

..."U'Malu Et HaAretz VeKivshuha" (and fill the earth and conquer it). Man was called upon to defy opposition on the part of nature and to march to victory. Biblical man is out to subdue his environment. Yet when conquest is within man's reach and the road to realization has been cleared of all hindrances, man-victor, who needs only to reach out and grab everything that his heart has desired, must change his course and begin to withdraw. When victory is near, man must invite defeat and surrender the spoils that he had quested for so long. The movement is dialectical: the forward marching ends in retreat, which in turn leads to a resumption of the forward march...

According to the Rav's formulation, it is just as important for a person to resume his activities following a periodic withdrawal from them, as is mandated by the observance of Shabbat, as it is to withdraw from them in the first place. As inappropriate as it would be for a Jew not to observe Shabbat at all, it would also be improper for him to approach every day as if it was Shabbat.¹⁰ R. Soloveitchik maintains that complete submission to God resulting in failure to engage in the world of the work-week would be

¹⁰ A distinction ought to be made between actually observing the laws of Shabbat each weekday, and keeping Shabbat in mind throughout the week. The Rabbis mention two different manifestations of how one should keep Shabbat in mind continually:

Beitza 16a

It was taught: They related concerning Shammai, the Elder [that] all his life he ate in honor of the Sabbath. [Thus] if he found a well-favored animal he said, Let this be for the Sabbath. [If afterwards] he found one better favored he put aside the second [for the Sabbath] and ate the first. But Hillel the Elder had a different trait, for all his works were for the sake of heaven, for it is said: (Tehillim 68:20) "Blessed be the Lord, day by day." It was likewise taught: Beth Shammai say: From the first day of the week [prepare] for the Sabbath; but Beth Hillel say: "Blessed be the Lord, day by day."

Mechilta on Shemot 20:8

R. Yitzchak says: You should not count the days of the week as others count them. Rather you should count them with reference to Shabbat.

RaMBaN on Shemot 20:8

...The meaning of this is that other nations count the days of the week in such a manner that each is independent of the other. Thus they call each day by a separate name...But Israel counts all of the days with reference to Shabbat "one day after the Shabbat", "two days after the Shabbat" ...

Consequently, even though one only actually avoids Melacha, as well as fulfills positive Commandments such as lighting candles, reciting Kiddush etc., on one day each week, Shabbat should nevertheless remain on one's mind throughout. Perhaps one can say that this goes beyond simply physically preparing for Shabbat and invoking Shabbat in one's conversation, but also remaining conscious of Shabbat's symbolism and implications, not only when one actually rests, but even while one is engaged in creative work.

as injurious to the dialectic that God Envisions for man as would be an immersion in creative activity that leaves no room for acknowledgement of God's Place in one's life.¹¹

Do the dynamics of the dialectic change along with the unfolding of Jewish history?

Returning to R. Hirsch's original comments on VaYikra 23:3, the second intriguing aspect of his approach is the suggestion that "Shabbat", while remaining central and fundamental to Judaism, nevertheless takes on **different connotations during different periods of the Jewish experience: a)** Creation, **b)** the struggle for food in the wilderness, **c)** the receiving of the Tora at Sinai, **d)** as part of the general social contract that informs Jewish social interactions, and **e)** in relationship with the Temple. Assuming that R. Hirsch is correct in his categorizations, it would be reasonable to assume that in each of these periods, one might have thought that Shabbat would not be applicable had the Tora not specifically stated otherwise. Perhaps one might have thought that the desert conditions that brought into question where food and drink would be obtained entailed Pikuach Nefesh (the endangerment of life) and therefore perhaps certain aspects of Shabbat would be deferred until more normal conditions would be encountered. As for receiving the Tora at Sinai, it was important to emphasize how Shabbat takes its place among the first five¹² of the Ten Commandments, Mitzvot that stress man's relationship with HaShem. Yet when the rules mainly governing interpersonal relationships are set forth, Shabbat is again mentioned, leading us to reflect upon the social aspects of this observance, i.e., allowing slaves to rest, deemphasizing once a week the pursuit of material possessions, allowing people to come together to share prayer, study, food and good fellowship, etc. The Temple service involves some ostensible suspensions of Shabbat prohibitions, e.g., slaughtering, cutting, burning public sacrifices; but by mentioning Shabbat in juxtaposition with the sacrificial service, the Tora calls attention to the rest of the rules governing the cessation of Melacha remaining in effect even within the Temple precincts.

But R. Hirsch does not appear to include all of the instances where Shabbat is mentioned in the Tora within his categorization scheme. Perhaps VaYikra 19:3 can be accounted for as part of a reformulation of the Ten Commandments in alternate form and order,¹³ therefore paralleling Shabbat

¹¹ A support for the dialectical approach that the Rav suggests can be found in the Midrash Halacha on the Ten Commandments in Shemot:

Mechilta D'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai on Shemot 20:9 (cited in R. Menachem Kasher, Tora Shleima, Parshat Yitro, p. 69, and further explicated in the addendum to that volume, p. 242 ff.)

"Six days you will work"—Rebbe says: This is another decree (i.e., Divine Directive, Mitzva). Just as Israel is commanded regarding the positive Commandment of Shabbat, *** so too it is commanded with respect to "Melacha"** (i.e., that there is a positive Commandment to engage in creative activity when it is not Shabbat).**

* This would appear to be a reference to the positive aspect of the act of desisting from "Melacha", i.e., "Shabbaton", discussed by RaMBaN, and cited in fn. 8 above.

** In his addendum essay, "Sheishet Yamim Ta'avod" (Tora Shleima, Parshat Yitro, Section 14, p. 142) R. Kasher suggests that the reason why Rebbe interpreted "Six days you shall work" in this manner is because it is otherwise difficult to account for the repetition of this phrase 8 different times: Shemot 16:26; 20:9-10; 23:12; 31:15; 34:21; 35:2; VaYikra 23:3; Devarim 5:13. It's one thing to repeat the Commandment of "Shabbat" but why stress so many times the idea of working for six days, unless this too is a Commandment.

¹² 1) Belief in God; 2) Prohibition against idolatry; 3) Prohibition against taking God's Name in vain; **4) Remembering Shabbat**; 5) Respecting parents.

¹³ **Shemot 20; Devarim 5**
1) Belief in God

VaYikra 19
19:2

of the Decalogue. However, explaining the “unique phase of Jewish life” suggested by Shemot 34:21 where Shabbat is mentioned in the middle of the other holy days,¹⁴ and VaYikra 23:3 where it is listed first with respect to other holy days,¹⁵ appears to be more challenging. It is possible that the experience of Shabbat prior to the institution of additional holy days, such as the Pilgrimage Festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot as well as the Yamim Noraim (days of awe) which also call for the cessation of Melacha at least to some degree,¹⁶ was unique, and the manner in which Jews approach Shabbat becomes altered once other days of the year are also designated for the cessation of the pursuit of one’s livelihood. Furthermore, the symbolism of Shabbat which originally exclusively represented our acknowledgement of God’s Completion of Creation, changes with the evolution of the Jewish people and its history—in the version of the Ten Commandments recorded in Shemot 20:10 “Shabbat” is associated with the theme of God Resting is invoked, while Devarim 5:14 emphasizes Shabbat’s reflecting the lessons learned from the enslavement in Egypt. Could the Tora’s invocation of Shabbat within the context of other Jewish holy days in Shemot 34 and VaYikra 23 emphasize the differences and similarities intrinsic to these respective days, i.e., the common denominator between them is a commitment to sacrificially set aside personal pursuit of livelihood and self-advancement in order to demonstrate and reflect upon our devotion to God, even as the focus of our contemplation during these various days are different spiritual themes—our creaturehood in light of God’s Creation (Shabbat), God’s Intervention in Jewish history (Moadim), and the necessity for us to reflect upon our merits and demerits and strive to improve our level of Mitzva performance and relationship to the Divine (Yamim Noraim)?

2) Prohibition against idolatry	19:4
3) Prohibition against taking God’s Name in vein	19:12
4) Remembering/Observing “Shabbat”	19:3
5) Respecting parents	19:3
6) Do not murder	19:16
7) Do not engage in sexual immorality	19:20, 29
8) Do not steal	19:11
9) Do not testify falsely	19:11
10) Do not covet	19:18(?)

¹⁴ Shemot 34:18 ff. Pesach
34:21 **Shabbat**
34:22 Shavuot, Sukkot

¹⁵ VaYikra **23:3** **Shabbat**
23:5 ff. Pesach
23:16 ff. Shavuot
23:24 ff. Rosh HaShana
23:27 ff. Yom HaKippurim
23:34 ff. Sukkot

¹⁶ Although most Melacha is prohibited on these days, the prohibition is not as all-inclusive as on Shabbat. With the exception of Yom HaKippurim when the restrictions are identical to those of Shabbat, activities that are deemed necessary for Ochel Nefesh (lit. consumption of the soul; certain actions involved in food preparation) as well as carrying from one domain to another or within a public domain, and transferring fire, are permitted.