

Parashat Vaetchanan

The Ten "Dibrot"

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I would like this week to continue in the footsteps of our shiur last week, where we compared Moshe's retelling in Sefer Devarim of an incident from a previous sefer with the original narrative in the Torah. Last week, I advanced two principles to explain the differences:

- a. In the story of the appointment of the judges, I suggested that certain facts had changed in the intervening years, which Moshe takes into account when retelling the same story;
- b. In the story of the spies, I suggested that Moshe has a particular objective in his speech, which he emphasizes by stressing certain facts while ignoring others.

This week, I wish to analyze one of the most famous and widely-discussed repetitions of Sefer Devarim, the "aseret ha-dibrot" (the ten commandments). We will, I think, have to formulate a different principle to explain why certain aspects of the dibrot are emphasized differently by Moshe.

The first three dibrot show no differences between the version in Devarim and that in Shemot. Here, Moshe cites the original words of God exactly.

The fifth dibra has two minor differences which do not present a problem for the "pshat." To the command, "Honor your father and mother," Moshe adds "as you were commanded by HaShem your God;" and, to the promise of Shemot, "in order that your days be long," he adds, "and in order that it be well for you." The first addition is meant to stress that Moshe is only quoting mitzvot previously given and not new ones. The second is also not particularly significant for pshat. It is an example of a common parallelism used in Tanakh, whereby Moshe wishes to stress the reward due to one who honors his parents. This does not change the import of the original verse, but continues and strengthens it - not only will one's life be long, but it will be good as well. (Of course, from the point of view of "drash," every variation is significant. We are discussing only those differences which, like the examples of last week, constitute a significant difference in content between the versions.)

Similarly, we need not be concerned by the addition of the "vav ha-chibur" (the introduction of each dibra with the preposition "and") to the seventh and eighth dibrot ("And do not commit adultery and do not steal"). Moshe is summarizing the history of the desert, including the ten commandments. He is not required to exactly cite every word. Use of a preposition to introduce a new verse is an appropriate convention of speech, even if God did not use it in the original. (Again, drash operates on a different level. R. Akiva, as quoted in the midrash, maintains that the addition of a "vav" is sufficient to deduce a halakha).

The difference in the ninth dibra can be interpreted in several ways. In place of the version in Shemot - "You shall not bear FALSE witness (eid sheker) against your fellow" - Moshe says in Devarim, "You shall not bear VAIN witness (eid shav) against your fellow." What is the difference between "sheker" and "shav?" Do both terms refer to the same crime - perjury - or perhaps to two different transgressions?

The Ramban ([Devarim 5:16](#)) claims that the version of Sefer Devarim includes a specific addition: "You shall not bear vain witness" prohibits testifying against his friend even if the content of the testimony is nothing and causes no obligation in court; e.g., if he testifies that someone promised to give money to someone else but did not execute a binding act of obligation (kinyan), for "shav" means something without significance.

According to the Ramban, "false witness" is incorrect testimony which damages someone, whereas "vain testimony" is incorrect testimony of any sort, even innocuous.

One could, of course, argue that "vain" and "false" are synonyms, and Moshe is merely introducing a stylistic change. This is supported by other places where "shav" appears as a synonym for "shaker;" for instance, "They beheld vanity (shav) and false divination" ([Yechezkel 13,6](#)), or "you have spoken vanities and beheld lies" (ibid. 8). Many verses in Tehillim also exhibit a parallelism between "shav" and "sheker" - "Whose mouths speak 'shav' and their right hand is the right hand of 'shaker'" (144:8).

In any event, we are not dealing with a significant change in meaning which would indicate a different context or approach of Moshe in comparison to the original revelation of God on Sinai.

In contrast to all of these examples, the mitzva of Shabbat is expressed in two totally different ways, or rather, is accompanied by two different explanations, which thereby result in two different understandings of Shabbat.

Parshat Yitro: Remember the Shabbat day to sanctify it; Six days shall you labor and do all your work, But the seventh day is Shabbat to HaShem your God - You shall not do any work, you, your son and your daughter, your slave and maid-

servant and animal, and the stranger in your gates. For six days did God make the heavens and the earth, the sea and all in it, and He rested on the seventh day. Therefore, God blessed the Shabbat day and sanctified it.

The reason for the existence of Shabbat and its sanctity, as explained in Shemot, is the creation of the world in six days. Since God rested on the seventh day, thereby sanctifying it, man is commanded to refrain from working on this holy and blessed day.

In contradistinction, in our parsha we read: Keep the Shabbat day to sanctify it; Six days shall you labor and do all your work, But the seventh day is Shabbat to HaShem your God - You shall not do any work, you, your son and your daughter, and your slave and maid-servant, and your ox and your mule and all your animals, and the stranger in your gates. In order that your slave and maid-servant rest like you. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt And HaShem your God took you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; Therefore HaShem your God has commanded you to make the Shabbat day.

According to Moshe's speech in Devarim, the purpose of Shabbat is one of social welfare. Once a week, it is important to allow the workers to rest after they have labored all week - and not merely humans, but even animals are included (and therefore the simple "your animal" of Yitro is expanded in Devarim to "your ox and your mule and all your animals"). The creation of the world is not the background for Shabbat, but rather the exodus from Egypt - the contrast of freedom and slavery.

Two different reasons for the mitzva of Shabbat are also two different claims as to the nature of Shabbat. In Yitro, God is active, He sanctifies Shabbat - in fact, He has done so since creation. Man is reacting to this primordial sanctity and refraining from work. In our parsha, on the other hand, the responsibility for the sanctity of Shabbat is placed on Man - "therefore HaShem your God has commanded you to make the Shabbat day." Man is commanded to allow his workers to rest. Moreover, the parsha emphasizes not the sanctity of Shabbat, but its social benefits.

How are we to understand this crucial shift in meaning? If Moshe changes the meaning of Shabbat, he seems to be inventing a new concept of Shabbat, rooted in the moral world and divorced from the world of religious meaning expressed by God in Yitro.

Before we begin to try and understand this problem, it is worth noting that of course we are not assuming that Moshe has invented this new conception on his own. In fact, the social component of Shabbat is already mentioned in parshat Mishpatim: "Six days shall you do work, and on the seventh day you shall cease, in order that your ox and mule rest, and the son of your maid and the stranger be

refreshed" ([Shemot 23,12](#)). Not only the themes are similar, the very wording is highly reminiscent of our parsha ("in order that ... rest"), to the extent that it appears that Moshe is quoting that section from Mishpatim.

Chrefer to this duality in the famous phrase, "zakhor and shamor were said simultaneously." Both versions of Shabbat, zakhor (parshat Yitro) and shamor (Vaetchanan), the religious aspect of Shabbat and the social aspect, were said by God.

The Ibn Ezra (Yitro) notices these differences and claims that Moshe in Devarim wishes to emphasize that aspect of Shabbat which the Jews did not hear directly at Mt. Sinai.

The main thrust of the question, however, remains. Even if both aspects of Shabbat derive from the word of God, we still have to understand why one aspect was emphasized on Mt. Sinai, while the other was chosen by Moshe to form the central point of his exposition on the plains of Moav.

I believe that the answer is found in the historical situation of the Jews, first at the foot of Mt. Sinai and secondly, at the edge of the Land of Israel. The people who received the revelation of Sinai would have had great difficulty in understanding and identifying with the conceptual world of a farmer who works his land. They were wandering nomads in the arid desert, whose only object is finding water and some food. None of them owned land or employed workers, none of them harnessed an ox or mule to a plow. Under these circumstances, it is very difficult to truly understand the exalted significance of social rest, or, conversely, of the temptation facing the farmer when confronted with the mandated leisure of his workers one day a week. In these circumstances, it is appropriate to stress the religious nature of Shabbat, to understand the religious holiness inherent in the cessation of work on this day.

Now, however, on the edge of the promised land, when they are looking forward to the settlement of their portions, now is the time to stress the social responsibility of the landowner in relation to his workers. Following the ten commandments in Vaetchanan, Moshe delivers the main message he has been leading up to in his long speech:

In all of the path that HaShem your God has commanded you shall you go, in order that you shall live, and it be well with you, and you shall live long on the land that you shall inherit. And this is the commandment to do in the land to which you are coming to inherit it" (5,30-6,1).

Throughout the speech of Sefer Devarim, Moshe emphasizes repeatedly that he is speaking to them before the enter the land, for the sake of the period which is about to commence. Therefore, Moshe now saw fit to emphasize the social aspect of Shabbat, which was becoming more and more relevant.

This same point explains another small difference in the versions of the dibrot, in the tenth dibra. In Yitro, there are seven examples given in the list of what one should not covet (lo tachmod) - house, wife, slave, maid-servant, ox, mule, everything. In our parsha (aside from placing "wife" before "house"), Moshe adds "field" to the list. In Yitro, fields were not mentioned as an object of desire.

I think that the explanation is identical to the previous point. Moshe sees before him now a people who are about to inherit fields, on which their livelihood will depend. It is therefore appropriate to emphasize that one should not covet the field of one's neighbor. Even if at Mt. Sinai this situation was beyond the conceptual horizon, it is now an immediate reality, and hence, Moshe adds it to the list.

Last week, we spoke of changes in the status of the people and of education considerations in order to explain the differences in Moshe's speech. Today, we have added a third consideration - the historical situation of the people who are about to be transformed from wandering nomads to settled farmers, who will establish a nation on the land promised to their forefathers.