

TORAH
OF
Reconciliation

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VA'ETCHANAN וַאֲתַחֲנַן

(Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11)

Who Should Rest?

Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God, in it you shall not do any manner of work, neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your man-servant, nor your maid-servant, nor your ox, nor your ass, nor any of your cattle, nor the stranger within your gates; so that your man-servant and your maid-servant may rest as well as you. And you shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord Your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:13-15)

“So that your man-servant and your maid-servant may rest as well as you. And you shall remember that you were a servant”: The commandment to rest the animals was [given] in order that the slave rest, and the commandment for the rest of the slave is a reminder of the exodus from Egypt in which the Holy One, blessed be He, gave a respite to the slaves from their work. (Seforno, Deuteronomy 5:14-15)

In contrast to the first version of the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20, the review in Deuteronomy cites the exodus from Egypt as the reason for complete rest on the Sabbath. In Exodus, the Sabbath was instituted in order that the Jew emulate the Creator, Who rested on the seventh day. In the reiteration of the Ten Commandments, the point of the Sabbath primarily is liberation for all. Here, as in Exodus, every being within the domain of the Jew is under the command to rest. The list includes family,

slaves, animals, and the stranger. The most vulnerable in society are accorded the same rights as the most privileged. The emphasis falls on the slave, male and female, who are mentioned twice in the same sentence! On the Sabbath day at least, distinctions in status fall away, and everyone shares, however briefly, in a vision of equality. The text seems to affirm that the freeing of slaves in Egypt has an ongoing application for the Jew to release those under one's control. The Sabbath legislation carries a utopian vision in which everyone is equal under the law.

What Is on God's Mind?

Hear, Israel: the Lord is our God; the Lord is One. (Deuteronomy 6:4)

[King] David said: "I wanted to hear just what the Holy One, blessed be He, speaks about. And I heard that He speaks about peace, as it is said: 'I will hear what the Lord God will say: for He will speak peace to His people and to His pious ones' (Psalms 85:9)." (*Midrash Rabba*, Deuteronomy 5:15)

The commandment to "hear" is central in Jewish tradition. Each day, morning and evening, without exception, an observant Jew is obligated to say the Shema ("hear"), based on the passage cited above. One is commanded to attempt literally to hear God! The call to listen is a summons to consider deeply the nature of God and the implications that follow for oneself. In Psalm 85, the author asks this question of himself: Of what does God speak? What is the subject of God's concern? David's answer is peace. The focus of God's hope for humanity is peacemaking.

Perhaps, then, the message that the Lord is One suggests that "Oneness" must also apply to human affairs. If God encompasses all, if God is the Creator of all, then there should be a corresponding human awareness of the need to actualize "Oneness" on earth.