

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Chayah Sarah *bas Alter a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Six Days of Work

PARSHAS VAYAKHEL 5776

The “order of the week” is a recurring theme throughout the Torah, as we find, for example, in the following *pesukim*: וְשֵׁשׁ יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעֵשִׂיתָ כָּל־מְלַאכְתְּךָ, וְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַד' אֱלֹהֶיךָ – “Six days shall you work and perform all of your labor; and the seventh day is Shabbos for Hashem your G-d” (*Shemos 20:9,10*); וְשֵׁשׁ יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי תִשָּׁבֵת – “Six days shall you work, and on the seventh day you shall rest” (*ibid. 34:21*).

The directive appears in the beginning of this week’s *parshah*, as well, but with some slight variation (in relation to the vowelization): וְשֵׁשׁ יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִהְיֶה לָּכֶם קֹדֶשׁ – “Six days work **shall be done**, and on the seventh day, it shall be holy to you...” (*ibid. 35:2*). As far as definition is concerned, the word-form as it appears here is more passive; while the standard form of “*ta’aseh*” means “you shall do (work),” “*tei’aseh*” intimates that “(work) shall be done.”

Shabbos and Sustenance

This represents the difference in terms of meaning. The Chafetz Chaim (quoted in *Darkei Mussar* [R’ Ya’akov Neiman]) explains the deeper significance of the shift. By employing the passive form, the Torah here is revealing the secret to *shemiras Shabbos* (Shabbos observance). *Baruch Hashem*, for the most part, the challenge of keeping Shabbos is not the same as it once was; but at other times in history – in this country and others – the pressures of finding sustenance made Shabbos observance a real trial. In any event, what the *passuk* is teaching us is that one’s attitude toward his weekday activities could significantly facilitate his *shemiras Shabbos*. If one views his labors as his *own*, that is, he feels that it is he himself who is in control of his earnings, then he will have a most difficult time refraining from work on Shabbos. After all, in his mind, he is running the show, and his sustenance depends on his actions; how, then, can he “afford” to rest on Shabbos and lose out on a whole day’s work? Thus, to repudiate this notion, the *passuk* specifically utilizes the passive form. For when a person recognizes that, essentially, his work simply “gets done” – that is, his sustenance is determined by Hashem alone – then he will have a much easier time making the Shabbos holy.

Thus we discover how Shabbos provides some fundamental lessons in *emunah* (faith), especially as it relates to the crucial area of everyday living and obtaining sustenance. The ideal in this regard emerges from a Mishnaic passage, discussing some wondrous elements lost to us in the wake of the Destruction of the Temple. The Mishnah states (*Sotah 9:12*):

מִשְׁחָרַב בַּיִת הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, בָּטַל הַשְּׁמִיר וְנִפְתָּ צוּפִים, וּפְסָקוֹ אֲנָשֵׁי אֲמִנָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר הוֹשִׁיעָה ה' כִּי גָמַר חֲסִיד וְגו'

“Once the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, the Shamir (worm-like creature with miraculous construction abilities) and the *nofes tzufim* (flour of supreme quality) disappeared; and ‘men of *emunah*’ ceased; as it states (*Tehillim 12:2*): ‘Save (us), Hashem, for pious men are no more...’”

The Gemara (*Sotah 48b*) identifies just what level of trust in Hashem these “*anshei emunah*” had (by illustrating what a lesser level consists of): פל מי שיש לו פת בסלו ואומר מה אוכל למחר אינו – “Whoever has bread in his basket (today) and says, ‘What shall I eat tomorrow?’ – this person’s level of trust is lacking.”

While not many people have attained this level, this illustration points in the direction of where, ideally, our attitudes should lay. And this was the lesson of “*tei’aseh melachah*.” Rather than succumbing to the somewhat heretical position of פְּחֵי וְעֵצֶם יְדֵי עֲשָׂה לִי אֶת־הַסִּיל הַזֶּה – “It is the strength and might of my own hand that has garnered for me this abundance” (*Devarim 8:17*) – it is important to heed the message of Shabbos and recognize the true Source of our sustenance.

The Mighty *Passuk*

The Chafetz Chaim would further illustrate this point with a real-life example. On a visit to the Russian city of Czernigov, the Chafetz Chaim heard of a Jewish man whose factory operated on Shabbos. The sage went to see the man to try to persuade him to correct his ways. Alas, he turned out to be a tough customer. “I make 4,000 rubles a day with this factory,” the man insisted. “That’s how much I stand to lose if I would close down on Shabbos.”

Trying to make him see reason, the Chafetz Chaim expounded on one of the *pesukim* cited above: “It states: ‘Six days shall you work, and on the seventh day you shall rest’ (*Shemos 34:21*). Now, why did the Torah have to include this introduction that ‘you should work for six days’; wouldn’t it have sufficed to merely state: ‘Rest on the seventh’?”

“What the *passuk* is telling us,” the Chafetz Chaim concluded, “is that one is dependent on the other. If you want to be able to ‘work for six days,’ you must ‘rest on the seventh.’ But if you do not ‘rest on the seventh,’ there will be nothing with which to work during the six days. You will lose everything.”

But the stubborn owner dismissed the admonition. “What? Are you telling me that a *passuk* will make me lose my bustling factory? I don’t believe it.” And, to his peril, he ignored the warning.

Of course, with the benefit of hindsight and knowledge of history, the rest of the story is not too difficult to figure out. This meeting took place in the early part of the 20th century. Soon enough, the Bolsheviks took over and went about appropriating private property over the breadth of the land. In the process, this man’s factory was taken away from him for good; it was only by a miracle that he escaped with his own life.

To his credit, he at least admitted his error. Shortly thereafter, he wrote to the Chafetz Chaim: “The *rebbe* was correct. A *passuk* was indeed able to halt the operation of my factory” (*Darkei Mussar*).