

A Teaching from Rabbi Weintraub:

Shabbat Emor | May 8-9, 2009

“Showing up is 90% of success.” (attributed to the modern Jewish sage, Woody Allen)

Chapter Twenty Three of Leviticus presents the Torah’s central description of the five major Holidays: Rosh Hoshana, Yom Kippur, Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot. Curiously, as soon as the subject of Holidays is introduced (verse one) it is immediately interrupted by a quick “advertisement” for the Shabbat (verse two). This prompted Rashi to wonder “Mah Inyan Shabbat Etzel Mo’adot?” What has the Sabbath to do with the Festivals?

A large and very enjoyable part of my work is talking to people who are contemplating more Jewish commitment after a period of distance or disaffection. Frequently, as they introduce themselves, they share some version of “I do the major holidays but I can’t say that I go to services regularly (meaning Shabbat)”.

What’s the difference anyway?

The holiness of the Shabbat is eternal and fixed by G-d. The holiness of the Festivals, referred to as a “mo’adim” (singular, “mo’ed) depends on a calendar set by Jewish courts, and is fixed to important dates in the Israel’s history . The holiness of the Mo’ed is lesser, and so for example there are kinds of work, related to preparing food, which are allowed on mo’adim but prohibited on Shabbat.

According to Nachmanides, the communal character of the mo’adim was primary. On these days, he wrote, we “gather together in the House of G-d ...to publicly sanctify the day through prayer, praising the Lord, wearing clean garments....(and consuming) special food and drink“. Mo’adim bring Jews together, in conversation, in friendship, in shared interest, in singing and feasting. Mo’adim are associated with simcha and sasson, joy and gladness because true happiness is gained not just through sumptuary delights, or taking time off work, but by becoming close to other people.

The Shabbat retains the communal aspect but goes even beyond this, and is associated not just with Oneg, delight but with Ahava, love. Through the Shabbat, we gain a virtually mystical closeness to creation and to G-d.

So, if you mostly “do the Holidays” but don’t “come regularly”, see if you can push through the resistance and put yourself more routinely in Shul on Shabbat. There’s the same feasting, the same closeness, the same delight, and then more. You don’t even have to do much except place yourself in an environment. “And Israel who sanctifies Your Name will rest in it” (Shabbat Amidah prayer)