



*“Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart”*

SHEMOT > Vayakhel

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March 5, 2016
Vayakhel

Stress and its Antidote



Meaningful Sermons *“Words from the Heart Enter the Heart”*

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ABSTRACT

Does work stress you out?

Does that question stress you out?

Not to worry, this sermon will relax you – as it explains the God-given antidote to work-related stress.

It’s called...

Wait, not so fast. First you have to know the purpose of work. Do you live to work or work to live? When you know why you work, then work becomes your servant. Instead of you working, work works *for* you.

The interplay between the sweat and tears of building a Sanctuary for the Divine (work) and the simple serenity of being (Shabbat, the antidote to work) contains the secret to de-stressing (which is way different than distressing).

When you remember why you are building the building, you can work one hundred hours in joy. When you don’t know why you are building the building, one minute feels like torture.

This sermon stresses that point.

STRESS AND ITS ANTIDOTE

1. Surefire Cure for Stress (Joke)

Millie accompanies her husband Maurice, a workaholic, to the doctor's office. After he had given Maurice a full checkup, the doctor calls Millie into his office – alone.

He says, “Maurice is suffering from a very severe disease, caused by horrible stress. If you don't do the following, your husband will have only one week to live: Each morning, wake him up gently with a long and loving embrace, then fix him a healthy breakfast. Be pleasant at all times and make sure he is always in a good mood. Cook him only his favorite meals, lunch and dinner and allow him to fully relax after each. Don't burden him with any chores and don't discuss your problems with him, it will only make his stress worse. Don't argue with him, even if he criticizes you or makes fun of you. Let him be as arrogant as he wants to be. Try to keep him calm and relaxed in the evening by fulfilling all his wishes. Give him body massages. Encourage him to watch all the sport he can on the TV, even if it means missing your favorite programs. And most importantly, show him how much you love him. If you can do all of this, every day, for the next six months, I think Maurice will regain his health completely.”

On the way home, Maurice asks Millie: “What did the doctor say?”

Millie replies: “The doctor said you have one week to live.”

2. Stress is Stressful

Stress is, well, stressful.

As they say: “Stress is when you wake up screaming, but then you realize you haven't fallen asleep yet.”

And it does sometimes seem that the best way to deal with stress is to veg out and let yourself be completely pampered by others (although then those doing the pampering may suffer serious stress). So the pampering solution to stress is about as practical as an ejection seat in a helicopter.

Moreover, the greatest source of stress is not the home, but the workplace. Stress, it seems, is intimately tied to pressures of career advancement and professional accomplishment.

So the question arises: Is there a cure for stress? Does the Torah – which has a solution for everything – offer an antidote that makes all this work-related stress and anxiety go away?

3. Parshat Vayakhel

This week's Torah reading, *Parshat Vayakhel*, opens with an interesting juxtaposition: the building of the Temple and Shabbat. These two, at first glance, seem to be polar opposites. The former is all about working, while the latter is all about not working:

This is what the Torah says:

*Moses called the whole community of the children of Israel to assemble, and he said to them: "These are the things that the Lord commanded you to make. Six days work shall be done (tei'oseh), but the seventh day shall be holy, a day of complete rest to the Lord...."*¹

Notice that Moses assembled the whole community of Israel to tell them about the work to be done in building the Sanctuary – the portable Temple, the home of the Divine. But instead of telling them about how to do the work, Moses told them not to do the work on Shabbat. This seems strange.²

¹ Exodus 35:1-2.

² See Shabbat 49b; 70a.

Indeed, the Talmud derives the laws of Shabbat from the building of the Sanctuary.³ The very tools and techniques that were used for building are prohibited from being used on Shabbat. But what's the connection between the two?

4. The Midrash Explains

The Midrash addresses this puzzling set of circumstances by way of an analogy:

[Once there was] a king who had an administrator, whom the king instructed to build him a palace with ... specific adornments. The king ... was passionately excited about the project. Suddenly, in walked the queen and said to the king: "Have you forgotten your passionate excitement for me?" Immediately the king beckoned her over, and they rejoiced together.

So, too, when God instructed Moses in building the Sanctuary, Shabbat came and said: "You created me after the six days of creation and You sanctified me; now You instruct Israel to build the Sanctuary and You don't mention my name. Perhaps due to their great passionate zeal to build the Sanctuary, they will desecrate me!"

Immediately God beckoned her – Shabbat – over, and said to Moses: "Issue an instruction that the building of the Sanctuary shall never supersede the observance of Shabbat nor the festivals."⁴

Consumed with their passion for building, working and creating a home for God, the people might forget the peace and serenity of Shabbat. This is the reason that amid the instructions for the building of the Sanctuary, God inserted a reminder about the obligations of the day of rest. This way the workers and builders would never lose sight of their ultimate goal: sanctifying the mundane.

³ Shabbat 97b.

⁴ Midrash Hagadol ad loc.

Okay, so now we understand why the Torah mentions Shabbat in this place – so that even in the midst of creating a home for the Divine, we will never lose the mitzvah to rest.

But the connection seems a bit forced – is there not more to it? Perhaps this is trying to teach us something more fundamental.

5. Grammatical Findings

Truth so often depends on the details. One extra or missing dot in a computer program can make or break an entire global network.

As with many things in the Torah, the answer to a profound life question may be found in the seemingly minutest of details. And the answer to the intrinsic connection between Shabbat and the workings of the Sanctuary may be found in a grammatical nuance.⁵

The Torah states:

“These are the things that the Lord commanded you to make. Six days work shall be done (tei’oseh), but the seventh day shall be holy, a day of complete rest to the Lord...”

Note that the word generally used to command work during the week is *taaseh*, meaning “you shall do” or “you shall make.” But here it is *tei’oseh*, meaning “shall be done” or “shall happen.” Why the change in grammar?

Why does it say *six days work shall be done* and not *six days work you shall do*? Why the more passive voice (it will happen) instead of a more active voice (you shall make it happen)?

The difference between *taaseh*, actively doing, and *tei’oseh*, passively happening, holds the secret to never getting stressed out by work – indeed, it embodies the secret of the very nature of work itself.

⁵See Likkutei Sichot vol. I, p. 187-193.

The Torah is teaching us that the only way to truly work, to truly build a home for God here on earth, is if you *let it* happen not if you *make it* happen.

6. Holy Purpose vs. Constant Struggle

Let me explain:

The purpose of creation is to make a home for the Divine out of all the materials provided to us. And the building of the Sanctuary is the embodiment and template for this building process.⁶ Six days a week we have to work to achieve this end, to build this home.

But there are two roads to success: 1) via a passive natural outcome of our efforts – *tei'osah*, “*work shall be done*,” or 2) via a forced active battle – *taaseh*, “*work you shall do*.”

These two approaches to work depend *on the seventh day [which] shall be holy, a day of complete rest to the Lord...*

When you have a holy purpose that transcends the work itself, then the work will be *tei'osah*, a natural and smooth outcome of your mission here on earth. If, however, you have not the reminder and anchor of Shabbat, then your work will be, *taaseh*, a constant struggle between who you are and what you do, between your essence and your actions.

And this is why, as the Midrash explains, Shabbat is placed right smack in middle of the building of the Sanctuary – it is a reminder to the builders of the purpose of their work. God knows that we could get carried away, even with a great mitzvah like building a home for God, which we are commanded to do six days a week.⁷ We can forget the purpose – the Shabbat, the sanctity – that lays at the heart of our work.

⁶Ohr Hatorah, Vayakhel (Shemot VI) p. 2133.

⁷See sources in Likkutei Sichot ibid fn. #8.

So, by telling Moses to instruct the people about the holiness of Shabbat in the middle of the building instructions for the Sanctuary, God reminds us all of the holy purpose of our work and ensures that it never supersedes its purpose.

7. Working Without Stress

That brings us back to work and stress.

Do you live to work or work to live?

Stress happens when your purpose and your reality are misaligned. When your purpose is clear, your work flows naturally. You feel that you are in the zone, everything happens more or less effortlessly, and there is no stress. This is the blessing of *tei'osah*, “*work shall be done.*”

When, however, you do not understand how your work is fulfilling who you are, all that's left is stress and hardship. Then every effort is a chore, not a pleasure. Work then becomes an anxiety-ridden bother. This is the hardship of *taaseh*, “*work you shall do.*”

The question is how to create the natural flow of work, the unstressed ease of fluidity and peace? The answer is this:

You have to understand that God commissioned you to build an oasis in this world; that is your sole (and soul) goal, mission and purpose. This means that work is a *means* to this end. If you approach work with that understanding, then work works for you, you don't work for it. You work to live and fulfill your mission to sanctify the universe through your work, instead of living to work.

This is why the Torah juxtaposes Shabbat with the building of the Sanctuary – to get the message across that every aspect of your work is geared to building a home of the Divine. The driving force and end goal is the realization of that purpose, when the Divine Presence finally moves into the fully constructed house. And that is Shabbat.

8. The Focus is Shabbat

Whether your field of endeavor is medicine or law or education or the arts ... whether you are retired, semi-retired or wish you were retired ... all of your work is focused on building a sacred sanctuary and on Shabbat.

A homeowner builds his house with one purpose – not to just build and do but to move in and enjoy living there. That is the parallel to building the Sanctuary and enjoying Shabbat. We build in order to bring down the sublime presence of God into our personal lives and into the world at large.

When we understand this, all work-related and work-generated stress evaporates. We are on a holy mission and we cannot fail. Everything comes naturally from above.

When work is the sole goal, it is forced; when Shabbat is the sole goal, the work comes naturally. When you have a higher purpose, you can work one hundred hours and not get tired or stressed. When your goal is making money or collecting base possessions, or making yourself feel successful, then you are likely to be so strung out that you feel like a fiddle.

The problem most people have – and the number-one source of their stress – is they have no idea why they work in the first place. Just “to do” can’t be the sole answer. That’s like saying you breathe to live. Of course you breathe to live... but *why* do you live?

The answer is simple: Six days a week you work to build a home for the truth and peace that is also known as God. Sure you work to make money and support your family and be a productive member of society. But that’s not the sole end goal – that’s only so that you can live and build out of this mundane earth a heavenly home for the Divine. To bring up healthy, virtuous and soulful children, in a loving and nurturing home.

9. Digging Deeper (Joke)

An old gentleman lived alone in New Jersey. He wanted to plant his annual tomato garden, but it was very difficult work, as the ground was hard. His only son, Vincent, who used to help him, was in prison. The old man wrote a letter to his son and described his predicament:

Dear Vincent, I am feeling pretty sad because it looks like I won't be able to plant my tomato garden this year. I'm just getting too old to be digging up a garden plot. I know if you were here my troubles would be over. I know you would be happy to dig the plot for me, like in the old days. Love, Papa

A few days later he received a letter from his son.

Dear Papa, Don't dig up that garden. That's where the bodies are buried. Love, Vinnie

At 4 a.m. the next morning, FBI agents and local police arrived and dug up the entire area without finding any bodies. They apologized to the old man and left. The next day the old man received another letter from his son.

Dear Papa, Go ahead and plant the tomatoes now. That's the best I could do under the circumstances.

10. In Tune (Conclusion)

When you are in tune with your purpose, all of your work seems to happen for you, the world seems to dig up the earth for you so that you may plant the perfect seeds.

When you aren't in tune with our purpose, you seem to be enslaved by your work, and everything seems to be a hardship and a chore.

Connect to why you live and everything you do will come with ease, peace and tranquility.

A world that is in tune with why it builds is a world that is ready for reality that is *yom shekulo Shabbat*, complete and total Shabbat!

Shabbat Shalom!

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