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By
Rabbi Marc D. Angel

Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Ki Tissa

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"The children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as an eternal covenant."

This famous verse from this week's parasha seems to have a redundancy. It informs us that the children of Israel "shall keep" Shabbat "to observe" Shabbat. How do we "keep" Shabbat "to observe" it?

The great Hassidic master, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, explained the verse as follows: we are commanded to keep the Sabbath. When we actually do keep the Sabbath, we will find that it is a wonderful, soul-satisfying experience. Indeed, it is so fulfilling that we will want to observe the Sabbath next week, and the week after, and throughout the generations.

Some people consider the many laws of Shabbat and think: we can't do that, Shabbat is too difficult, it requires too many sacrifices. But when they do actually observe Shabbat, they find that the experience is delightful. They enjoy the Shabbat meals, they rejoice in the synagogue services, they gain wisdom from Shabbat Torah study, they relish the time spent quietly with family and friends. Indeed, Shabbat is so extraordinary that those who observe it wonder how it would be possible to live without Shabbat. Those who love Shabbat pine for Shabbat from week to week; their lives center around the rhythms of the weekly Shabbat. When one has truly kept Shabbat, he/she desires to observe Shabbat again and again. This is what the Torah means: when the children of Israel keep Shabbat, they will continue to observe Shabbat in the future. The powerful experience of Shabbat inspires them to want to observe Shabbat each week.

This is an important lesson about Judaism in general. We have many mitzvoth, customs and traditions. At first glance, all these things may seem to be enormous burdens, overwhelmingly difficult to observe. But once we do observe the mitzvoth, they become part of the fabric of our lives--and we find that they are essential to our physical, spiritual and emotional wellbeing. They are tremendous

sources of joy and inner strength. Fulfilling one mitzvah leads us to want to fulfill it again--and to fulfill other mitzvoth as well.

The great 17th century author, Isaac Cardoso, pointed out: to those who don't love the Torah, even six commandments seem as difficult as 613; but to those who love the Torah, 613 commandments seem as easy as just six. It is a matter of attitude. A positive, enthusiastic attitude leads one to fulfill the mitzvoth with great satisfaction and happiness. A negative, unenthusiastic attitude leads one to think of the mitzvoth as burdensome and unpleasant.

The greatest gift that Jewish parents and grandparents can give their progeny is an attitude and experience of joy in fulfilling Shabbat and the other mitzvoth. We teach not by talking at our children and grandchildren, but by sharing with them the fulfillment of the commandments in a spirit of happiness and meaningfulness. If we will keep the Shabbat and other commandments, we will want to observe them again and again; our younger generations will learn to value the mitzvoth, and will continue our traditions throughout the generations.

***PASSOVER REMINDER: Rabbi Marc Angel's Sephardic Haggada and Gilda Angel's Sephardic Holiday Cookbook are available through the Institute's online store at jewishideas.org. Please order soon so that these books can reach you in time for Passover.

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