



ONE TORAH FOR ALL

One Torah shall be to him that is home-born, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.
Exodus 12:49

Zerubbabel ben Emunah
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Understanding Torah Society

Part 25 – Work and Recreation

Shemot (Exodus) 20:9

Six days shall you labor, and do all your work.

This is one of the most needful subjects today and perhaps one of the most difficult to discuss. It is needful because few seem to have a good balance in this area between work and play. When one factors in service to YHWH, then this subject becomes even more difficult to understand in light of Scripture. This is perhaps true since there are no clear references to recreation in Scripture, at least not in English versions of Scripture.

Likewise, it is also difficult to discuss because many followers of Mashiach soundly condemn any form of recreation, particularly if that recreation comes in the form of entertainment. This subject can become fraught with emotions and go off topic rather quickly if one does not work to keep his emotions in check. We will endeavor to look into this subject from a rational point of view based upon Scripture.

In a society which is basically hedonistic, such an attribute will naturally be reflected in the believing community. Hedonism is the seeking after pleasure for the sake of pleasure. It basically boils down to: “Why are we doing what we are doing?” Sometimes, this question is not an easy question to answer. However, it is vital that one answer it if he is going to honestly face the question and place of recreation in his life according to YHWH.

One of the guiding principles across all aspects of our lives in Mashiach needs to be to let YHWH be the Elohim of my neighbors and brethren. I cannot attempt to dictate to another person for any reason in any matter how he must or should live his life. This is particularly true in the matter of recreation. Each person must always be extra careful not to condemn another for his

recreation. If we see something which concerns us, then we must certainly go to the other person, in private, and calmly and rationally discuss the matter with him, being careful not to put our own personal convictions upon him as if they were equivalent to Torah. To do such a thing is breaking the commandment not to add to or take away from Torah. Furthermore, such an action is idolatrous.

Since there are not many passages which deal with this subject, that is, there are no passages in which we find, "Thus says YHWH..." on the subject of recreation, we must then look for some guiding principles contained in Scripture which deal with this matter. YHWH has placed two types of passages for us to glean understanding. One type consists of passages where some type of play is being referenced as being good in the eyes of YHWH, and the other type of passage consists of some type of play being referenced as being evil in the eyes of YHWH. Hopefully, by examining these two types of passages with honesty, we will be able to draw some well-grounded principles to help guide us in our daily living concerning the matter of recreation.

Our opening passage contains a direct commandment to work for six days and rest upon the seventh day. This cycle is occasionally broken by YHWH's own calendar when one of His appointed times falls in the midst of the week, thus giving us extra days off from this six days of work followed by one day of rest cycle.

One thing we all desire to avoid is being guilty of adding to or taking away from His Torah. To rightfully guard against this, it seems reasonable that one must rightly understand what it means to add to or take away from His Torah. This may seem rather simplistic, or that such an idea is so simple, or that it is a given, and everyone should easily understand what this principle means. However, we submit to you that, while many see what the words mean, in a practical sense, few understand how those words should be rightly applied in our everyday living. Simply put, to add to Torah is to take something which is not Torah and elevate it to the same level of Torah, thus making it binding upon others, or to take something which is Torah and to make it void or null, thus doing away with it. If neither one of these is done, then the commandment to not add to or take away from Torah is not broken. Thus, when it comes to traditions, there are many traditions which do not violate this commandment. Those traditions which are elevated to the status and force of Torah are a violation of Torah. To determine this, each tradition must be examined on an individual basis. What this means in a practical sense then is this: a tradition to one person may be a violation of Torah and yet to another it may not be a violation. It depends upon how an individual sees and acts upon the tradition. Keeping these things in mind, let us proceed into examining a few passages of Scripture which deal with "play" (recreation).

Yirmeyah (Jeremiah) 30:19

"And out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry; and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small."

The passages above as well as the passage directly below are both prophetic in nature. That is, YHWH is telling us how it is going to be sometime in the future among His people. Furthermore, this prophetic view includes an activity which seems to be pleasing to Him.

Both of these passages have a Hebrew word in common which is translated as “merry” in each passage. The Hebrew word is משחקים – “m’sachaqim” (m’sah-kah-keem), whose root word is שחק – “sachaq” (sah-KAHK), which means to *express satisfaction in overcoming difficulties*. This word is used to convey a wide range of meanings and is translated as meaning “mocking, smiling, laughing, displaying irony, and competing successfully,” each one according to context. This single word has within it all the different levels and aspects of recreation.

In the passage above, YHWH tells us there shall be a day in which many will be playing in the streets along with thanksgiving. In other words, His people shall be happy. It is a wonderful picture of what the future holds for His people. May it be soon and in our day!

Yirmeyah (Jeremiah) 31:4

“Again will I build you, and you shall be built, virgin of Israel; again shall you be adorned with your tambourines, and shall go forth in the dances of them that make merry.”

This passage likewise is prophetically depicting that future time when His people will be happy and secure in the land. They will be so happy they will be dancing in the streets. Since it is YHWH who is saying this through His prophet, one can rightly surmise that He is pleased with this future action. We bring these two passages forward in this discussion to show that making merry is not wrong in and of itself, but rather, YHWH is pleased when we do so in Him. YHWH desires for His people to be happy and to show that happiness.

Lest one think that such a conclusion about our heavenly Father is unwarranted, please consider this next passage.

Zekaryah (Zechariah) 8:4-6

4 Thus says YHWH Tzava’ot, “There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for very age.

5 And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.”

6 Thus says YHWH Tzava’ot, “If it be marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in My eyes?” says YHWH Tzava’ot.

Here YHWH clearly states that it will be marvelous in His eyes when His people are happy and “playing” in the streets of their cities. The word “playing” is the same Hebrew word as in the two previous passages from Yirmeyah.

Now that we have briefly examined “righteous play,” let us turn to “unrighteous play.”

Shemot (Exodus) 32:6

And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt-offerings, and brought peace-offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

The passage directly above comes from the midst of that incident of the golden calf. Some play is then idolatrous in nature. Play can be good or play can be bad. It is not up to the individual to decide which is which. For a person to decide good and evil is eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Only YHWH has the right and the authority to decide that which is good and that which is evil. This certainly includes play. Any play which crosses the line into idolatry is evil and off-limits to His people. The question then becomes: how can one tell the difference between play which is acceptable and play which is not acceptable in His eyes?

This question, while simple to ask, is anything but simple to answer. As we continue in this discussion, hopefully, we can equip the reader with some sound solid principles to help him to be able to righteously determine which is which. Let us begin with the following passage.

Mishle (Proverbs) 26:18-19

18 As a madman who casts firebrands, arrows, and death,

19 So is the man that deceives his neighbor, and says, "Am not I in sport?"

This passage contains the same Hebrew word שקח – "sachaq." In modern culture language, what this passage would sound like is, "Just kidding." I know of no one who is not guilty of saying such a phrase. I certainly am. Scripture condemns the use of play to deceive another. Oftentimes, one will say things in jest as a means to throw barbs at another, using the cover of "humor" as a means to disguise the truth and intentions of his words. Verse eighteen reflects this reality. If one says something which hurts another, and upon being called to task for those words, if one responds with, "Oh, just kidding," to hide, cover up, or smooth over the hurt inflicted, then he has sinned. Each one of us needs to do a reality check in this matter before YHWH and allow His Spirit to open our eyes to the truth in our own hearts and actions.

Playing with words is not wrong, in fact, it is a lot of fun. I do it constantly. However, to play with words at the expense of another is wrong. Such an action is crossing the line from righteous play to unrighteous play.

Before the reader gets too bent out of shape about this matter, we need to discuss sarcasm. There is a lot of sarcasm in Scripture. Even YHWH is sarcastic at times (which we will get to momentarily).

Mishle (Proverbs) 26:4-5

***4 Answer not a fool according to his folly,
Lest you also be like him.***

***5 Answer a fool according to his folly,
Lest he be wise in his own conceit.***

These two verses teach us to do two different, yet opposite things, namely, not to answer a fool according to his folly, as well as, to answer a fool according to his folly. At first, one may think that one has to choose one or the other. However, I submit to you that a person can actually do both at the same time through the use of sarcasm. Sarcasm is the use of truth hidden in plain sight wrapped in the folly of the fool.

When YHWH's people act foolishly, then He will respond to them in this manner. It will be a completely righteous response, because there is no unrighteousness in Him. There are times when sarcasm is not only called for, but is actually the only response available if one is going to answer in the righteousness of His Spirit.

Tehillim (Psalm) 2:4
He that sits in the heavens will laugh;
YHWH scoffs at them.

At whom does YHWH laugh and scoff? It is towards those who do not obey His Voice and forsake Him.

Shophetim (Judges) 10:13-14

13 "Yet you have forsaken Me, and served other gods; wherefore I will save you no more.
14 Go and cry unto the gods which you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress."

When His people go and follow other gods, YHWH will be sarcastic towards them at times. This is what we see in the above passage. These gods which they have chosen to follow, gods of their own creation, are no gods and cannot save them. Yet, YHWH tells them to seek their gods for deliverance. This is sarcasm at its best! This is both, not answering a fool according to his folly as well as answering a fool according to his folly.

One of the means by which we may have righteous play is through the use of sarcasm. Sarcasm done properly hurts no one, is playful, yet drives home a needed point. This is also an aspect of sarcasm which can be hurtful. This type of sarcasm the righteous should avoid.

Mishle (Proverbs) 8:30
Then I was by Him, as a master workman;
And I was daily His delight,
Rejoicing always before Him,

The above passage is translated in a variety of ways in English translations. The word in particular in which we are presently interested is the word rendered as "rejoicing." This is the same word we have examined above, the Hebrew word שָׂחַק – "sachaq," which means among other things, *to play*. This verse then is declaring that YHWH is delighted when we play before Him. The truth of the matter is this: when we recreate, we need to include YHWH as we should in all aspects of life.

As we discuss several aspects of recreation, let us keep in mind that YHWH desires that none perish, but all come to eternal life. This does not mean such a thing will come to pass. What it does mean is that this is what YHWH is working towards. He is not in the business of seeing who He can exclude from His eternal kingdom, but rather, He is in the business of seeing who He can include. Far too many people take the former position when they should be taking the latter position. Honestly, the former position is how Satan works, seeing whom he can exclude from the kingdom of YHWH.

Let us also keep in mind that every part of the body of Mashiach is different and plays a unique role in His kingdom. Just because one part of the body does not understand the working of another part of the body does not make it any less a part of the body.

Outreach can be a grueling task. Sometimes it can even be dangerous; for example, those whom YHWH calls to go to foreign lands in which openly teaching in the name of our Mashiach is forbidden. However, outreach can also be fun. Sometimes YHWH calls a person to do something in the way of outreach that is not often seen in its true light.

John Bunyan wrote a wonderful book called Pilgrims Progress. It is a written work of fictional allegory depicting the life and times of a follower of Messiah and all the spiritual warfare through which a man goes in such a life. It could easily be categorized in the genre of fantasy.

Two other well-known writers also wrote fictional allegories depicting the same subject, the life of a follower of Messiah. These two authors are not as readily seen in this light, yet this is exactly what they did. C. S. Lewis is more readily recognized as writing an allegorical work with his Chronicles of Narnia, than is J. R. R. Tolkien who wrote The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings trilogy. These two men were good friends and without the personal encouragement of Lewis, Tolkien may never have written his works. Both are allegorical in nature. They were written to reach out to those who would never read the Bible.

However, because many followers today do not see these stories in the proper context of the purpose of their respective authors, the works are soundly condemned by some. Likewise, when these books are made into movies, the movies are also condemned as being "evil." This is true because of the presence of witches, sorcerers, magic, and other things which Scripture teaches us are not to be practiced. However, do we not realize that all those things which are condemned in these books and movies are also contained within the pages of Scripture? There are witches, rapes, murders, and every imaginable sin within Scripture. Therefore, in order not to be hypocritical, should not one also condemn Scripture? Do you see how such a position is untenable? Do you see how one can use sarcasm here?

Since these books were written as outreach tools to their respective audiences, is it not completely within the realm of possibility that the Spirit of YHWH led each of these men to write what they wrote? To be sure! If this is the case, then is not condemning such work equivalent to condemning the work of His Spirit? And if that is the case, then is that not

bordering on blasphemy of His Spirit? We ask these questions to show the reader that what often gets condemned, should not be condemned at all.

Should one not support the outreach work of the Spirit of YHWH? In the very least, let us not be guilty of condemning that which we do not understand. Since YHWH is sovereign over His creation, nothing goes on except by His express approval! Absolutely nothing!

There are many things softened or outright hidden from the English reader of Scripture. The Hebrew text is often quite racy, making it quite humorous, at least to this student of Scripture. It is time that we stop being so self-righteous and prudish when YHWH is not these things, nor does He expect us to be something we are not. He has created each person to be who they are in Him. Walking in a righteous manner before YHWH is not equivalent to being prudish.

Scripture contains sex, illicit as well as marital, rapes, murders, mayhem, and war, both warranted and unwarranted. It contains idolatry, child sacrifice, animal sacrifice, both commanded as well as not commanded, witchcraft, sorcery, necromancy, and every other sin. It is all there, recorded in Scripture. Why did YHWH put all these things in Scripture?

1st Corinthians 10:6

Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

Scripture is a reflection of our world. It is stained with sin. To ignore this is not being honest. These things are a part of the lives we live. Not every one of them touches each person directly, but every person has something which touches them. Part of dealing with these things in life is making sport of them. It helps us cope with all these things. This is one of the most important aspects of recreation-release.

Personally, I do not like movies in the drama genre. I already have too much drama in my life as it is. Therefore, I rarely watch a movie with a lot of drama in it. I like movies with action, movies where the good guy wins! If the good guy does not win, I am not interested in it. But that is my personal choice. Someone else may like drama in their movies; that is okay for them.

There is an aspect of recreation we have not yet discussed: professional sports. Competition is not wrong in and of itself. After all, Shaul refers to our walk as a race to be won or lost. Professional sports are a reflection of the society and it reveals cultural values are upside-down. Many in sports as well as acting are grossly overpaid. Many have become demigods who are worshipped and adored by their followers. This form of idolatry is rampant in our world today.

This idolatry does not necessarily make all sports evil or sinful. If kept in the right perspective, sports can teach a lot of skills to young and old alike. However, when a person becomes obsessed with something or someone, then it has crossed the line from good to evil.

Recreation is an important part of each person's life. Recreation needs to be balanced with a good work ethic.

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