

## **Acharei Mot**

by Benjamin Gee - Tuesday, May 07, 2019

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**The Chief Rabbi questions whether there are any mitzvot which are intended to make life difficult for us.**

Are any of the Mitzvot of the Torah given to us to make us suffer?

You might think that's the case in parashat Acharei Mot, where the Torah gives us the laws of Yom Kippur: we are told 'te'anu et nafshoteichem' – 'you must afflict your souls'.

The Rambam, in his Mishneh Torah, gives us his explanation. He quotes this verse and explains it by saying, 've'hi lishbot bo me'achila ush'tiya' – 'you must 'rest' on this day from eating and drinking'. It's the soft tone of 'resting' from something in order to provide an uplifting experience. So this 'affliction' is not there to make us suffer – rather it is providing us with the rules of a wonderful game without which we wouldn't be able to play.

It's for this reason that this whole section of law is called 'Shvitat Asor' – the 'resting' that we do on this day. It's a positive statement rather than a punitive one.

The same can be applied to all other areas of Jewish law which might seem to be unfairly restrictive. Let's take kashrut – the laws relating to kosher food or taharat hamishpacha – laws relating to family purity. They actually serve to enhance our lives, to give us meaning and added happiness and joy.

Perhaps the finest example of this is Shabbat. In the Ten Commandments presented in the Book of Devarim, the term used there by God is 'shamor' – 'guard the Sabbath day' meaning that we must separate ourselves from certain things that we do during the week. But in the Book of Shemot, the term used by God is, 'zachor' – 'remember the Sabbath day' through positive action. And in the Lecha Dodi prayer that we recite on Friday night, we declare, "shamor ve'zachor be'dibur echad" – Hashem issued these two statements in one single utterance – indicating that the 'shamor' is there for the sake of the 'zachor'. We relate to Shabbat not as being an unfair day of restriction but rather, as a most beautiful experience through which our lives can be shaped and enhanced immeasurably.

So, are there mitzvot of the Torah which are intended to cause us suffering? Absolutely not! Quite the contrary! It's thanks to all the mitzvot of the Torah that we can live a life of meaning, of spirituality and of deep happiness.

Shabbat Shalom

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