

# DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

## “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Emor  
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Emor – The beauty of Shabbat

This week's Parsha of Emor deals with the laws relating to the Kohanim and the special days of the Jewish calendar – the festivals and Shabbat. We also learn about the counting of the Omer – the time period which we are currently experiencing.

The pasuk which describes the counting of the Omer states as follows:

*“And you shall count for yourselves, from the day after “Shabbat” (the rest day) (ממחרת השבת) from the day you bring the Omer as a wave offering, seven weeks, they shall be complete” (Vayikra 23:15).*

From a literal reading of the pasuk, it sounds like the counting of the 7 weeks of the Omer should start on the day after Shabbat. This would mean that Shavuot would always fall out on a Sunday. However, the Gemara teaches us that the term “Shabbat” can also refer to a festival<sup>1</sup>. In this case, the reference to Shabbat refers to the first day of Pesach. This means that we start counting the Omer on the 2<sup>nd</sup> night of Pesach. There were a number of heretical sects<sup>2</sup> that denied the Oral Law and broke away from authentic Judaism. They argued that the pasuk should be read literally and thus believed that Shavuot should always be celebrated on a Sunday.

In his commentary to this section, the Ramban explains why the literal reading of the pasukim is incorrect. As part of his explanation, the Ramban discusses the meaning of the word “Shabbat”. He explains that “Shabbat” can also refer to a week, because every week contains a Shabbat and the Shabbat is the essence of the week. This is similar to how farmers use the word “head” when counting cattle. A farmer might say “I have 5,000 head of cattle”. The word “head” is used as a reference to the whole cow because the head is the most important part of the animal. If the cow doesn't have a head, then it is not a cow! Similarly, a week without Shabbat is not a week.

The entire week should revolve around the Shabbat. In Hebrew, the days of the week are not given names. They are just given numbers, counting up to Shabbat. Thus, we spend the entire week counting up to Shabbat. As the well-known saying goes: “More than the Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews”<sup>3</sup> Let's explore a bit more about the special nature of Shabbat.

#### Preparing for Shabbat

The Gemara teaches us that the greatest sages would take time away from their Torah study to ensure that they were personally involved in preparations for Shabbat<sup>4</sup>. For instance, one would chop the vegetables, another would chop the firewood and a third would light the fire. Even if they had other family members or employees who could take care of these tasks, they exerted themselves to make a personal contribution to the Shabbat preparations. Indeed, the Shulchan Aruch<sup>5</sup> rules that one should make an effort to personally prepare for Shabbat and should not think that this compromises their honour. The Shulchan Aruch explains that it is actually honourable to honour the Shabbat. The Mishnah Berurah<sup>6</sup> teaches that when buying something for Shabbat one should verbally state that it is “lichvod Shabbat” (for the honour of Shabbat). He explains that our speech has the power to add holiness. (As an aside, this demonstrates the important impact that our speech can have.)

There is a famous dispute between Hillel and Shammai as to how best to prepare for Shabbat.<sup>7</sup> From the beginning of the week, if Shammai came across a special item of food, he would put it aside for Shabbat. If he later found something even better, he would put that item aside for Shabbat and eat the first one. That way, Shammai was always keeping the best item for Shabbat. Hillel had a different approach. He would eat the first item when it became available and trust that

<sup>1</sup> See Rashi to Vayikra 23:11 and the Gemara Masechet Menachot 66a.

<sup>2</sup> The Sadducees and the Boethusians (צדוקים ובויתוסים)

<sup>3</sup> Asher Zvi Hirsch Ginsberg (known as “Achad Haam”), 1856-1927.

<sup>4</sup> Shabbat 19a.

<sup>5</sup> Orach Chaim 250:1.

<sup>6</sup> Orach Chaim 250:1, seif katan 2.

<sup>7</sup> Gemara Beitzah 16a.

Hashem will provide another one for Shabbat. How should we behave? This is one of the few cases where we would actually favour Shammai's approach. The Mishnah Berurah<sup>8</sup> explains in the name of many authorities that Hillel actually admits that Shammai's approach is preferred. However, Hillel was working on increasing his trust in Hashem and therefore he behaved the way that he did. Certainly, explains the Mishnah Berurah, if one comes across an item that is not readily available, one should save it for Shabbat.

### **A taste of the World to Come**

The Gemara<sup>9</sup> teaches us that Shabbat is a taste of the World to Come.<sup>10</sup> In what way is Shabbat like the World to Come? Many productive activities, such as cooking food, are forbidden on Shabbat. Therefore, if we want to enjoy the three meals of Shabbat, we need to prepare in advance, by cooking our food before Shabbat starts. This is analogous to the World to Come. Our level in the World to Come is determined by the mitzvot that we perform. However, it is no longer possible to perform mitzvot once we leave this world. Therefore, if we want to enjoy the World to Come, we need to prepare in advance by doing mitzvot in this world. This message about the World to Come is so important, that Hashem in his Divine wisdom decreed that we need to be reminded of it once a week for an entire day.

### **Bearing testimony to the creation**

Shabbat also reminds us that the world was created in seven days and that the world has a Creator. The 'week' is unique in that it does not reflect a natural astronomical event. The day is an obvious measure of time – we experience cycles of light and dark that reflect the rotation of the Earth on its axis. The month represents the cycle of the moon as it rotates around the Earth and gradually increases to a full moon and then decreases in size until it disappears. The year reflects the rotation of the Earth around the sun, and we experience it a cycle through the seasons. But the week does not have any obvious meaning. The only significance of the week is that it reminds us that the world was created in seven days. It is quite remarkable that the entire world recognises this cycle of seven days! When we stand up and say kiddush on Friday night, we are bearing testimony to the fact that there is a Creator who created the world in six days and rested on the seventh.

### **The craftsman's shingle**

The Chofetz Chaim compared Shabbat to a craftsman's shingle. When someone sets up shop, he hangs up a shingle outside his door so that people know he is in business and what kind of work he does. Even if the shop is closed, people know that he will be back. But if he takes down the shingle, then people know that his business is closed and he won't be back. Similarly, if a Jew keeps Shabbat, this is a sign of his fundamental belief. Even if he sins, by keeping Shabbat he demonstrates that he has not left his faith. But if a Jew stops keeping Shabbat, he demonstrates that his fundamental belief has been uprooted.

One of my (non-Jewish) partners in the law firm that I used to work for was very respectful of the Jewish religion. He loved the idea that we have one day a week without emails, phone calls or work. He told me on a number of occasions that he also wanted to take a day off from work every week.<sup>11</sup> Needless to say, he never succeeded. He did not have the self-discipline to keep himself away from his messages for so long without being subject to a commandment to do so. Jewish people are able to keep Shabbat because we were commanded to do so by Hashem. Shabbat is not just a day off from work, it only works its magic if we keep it properly, according to the halacha, and for the right reasons.

Let's try something this week:

1. Try to remember Shabbat during the entire week – this includes counting the days towards Shabbat, buying things especially for Shabbat and saying "lichvod Shabbat" out loud when preparing for Shabbat.
2. When experiencing Shabbat itself, remember that it is a precious gift that Hashem gave only to us, the Jewish people.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>8</sup> Orach Chaim 250:1, seif katan 2.

<sup>9</sup> Brachot 57b.

<sup>10</sup> The Gemara's terminology is that Shabbat is 1/60<sup>th</sup> of the World to Come. This means that by experiencing Shabbat properly we have a taste of the world to come. The Maharsha explains that the contentment we experience on Shabbat is a reflection of the pleasure that we will experience in the World to Come.

<sup>11</sup> As an aside, it is forbidden for non-Jews to keep Shabbat (Sanhedrin 58b). Shabbat is a precious gift that was given by Hashem just to the Jews. Therefore, a non-Jew who is in the process of converting needs to be sure that they do not keep Shabbat properly until they actually convert.