

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

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

### Parashat Vayeshev – Eager anticipation

In this week's Parasha of Vayeshev we read about Yosef's dreams about his brothers bowing down to him. There was existing tension between him and his brothers, given that Yosef was Yaakov's obvious favourite son. When Yosef related his dreams to his brothers, this fanned the flames of the brothers' hatred and envy. Let's examine the second of his dreams, which Yosef related to his brothers and to Yaakov.

Yosef dreamed that the sun, the moon and eleven stars were bowing to him.<sup>1</sup> After Yosef's previous dream, which was more explicit<sup>2</sup>, the representation of each character in this dream was clear – the sun was Yaakov, the moon was (apparently) Yosef's mother and the eleven stars were Yosef's brothers. According to the dream, all of his family were bowing down to Yosef.

When Yosef related this dream to his father and brothers, his father rebuked him. Yaakov said: "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Will I, your mother and your brothers come and prostrate ourselves to the ground before you?"<sup>3</sup>

In his commentary to this pasuk, Rashi explains that the reason Yaakov rebuked Yosef was because, by relating his dreams, he was bringing the hatred of his brothers upon himself. He verbally rebuked Yosef in his brothers' presence in order to minimise the importance of the dream and reduce their likely envy. Yaakov pointed out that the dream was impossible to fulfil because Yosef's mother, Rachel, was no longer alive. (However, Yaakov didn't realise that the 'moon' in Yosef's dream actually referred to Bilhah, Rachel's maid who raised Yosef like a mother.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, Rashi quotes the Gemara<sup>5</sup> which derives from here that all dreams, even genuine prophetic dreams, contain some meaningless content. Even though Yosef's real mother could not bow down to him, the rest of the dream was true.) Rashi concludes that Yaakov wanted make Yosef's brothers forget the whole matter so that they wouldn't envy him. Therefore, Yaakov focused on the fact that part of the dream was impossible to fulfil, thus deliberately implying that the rest of the dream was also meaningless.

The next pasuk then concludes: "So his brothers envied him, but his father שמר את הדבר (guarded the matter)".

How do we understand Yaakov's response? Rashi explains. Yaakov knew that Yosef was special and destined for greatness. Yaakov understood that the dream was true and that indeed Yosef would be a leader over his brothers and they would all bow down to him. But Yaakov also understood that Yosef's dreams were not contributing positively to the shalom bayit in the home, and it was not wise to communicate them to the brothers who were already envious of him. So Yaakov deliberately picked the dream apart and played it down. But Yaakov himself 'guarded the matter'. The word 'שומר' (shomer) usually means to guard. But Rashi quotes the Midrash<sup>6</sup> which brings proofs from several pasukim that shomer can also have the connotation of awaiting something. Thus, in his heart, Yaakov was waiting and looking forward in expectation to when the dream would be fulfilled.

The above Rashi teaches us that the term 'shomer' has an additional meaning over and above the usual 'guarding'. Let's apply this additional meaning to our common usage of the word. For instance, the word shomer is used in a number of cases in reference to various mitzvot. People who keep Shabbat are said to

<sup>1</sup> Breishit 37:9.

<sup>2</sup> In the first dream, the sheaves of wheat belonging to the brothers all bowed down to Yosef's sheaf of wheat.

<sup>3</sup> Breishit 37:10.

<sup>4</sup> Based on the Midrash, Breishit Rabbah 84:11, quoted by Rashi.

<sup>5</sup> Brachot 55a-b.

<sup>6</sup> Breishit Rabbah 84:12.

be shomer Shabbat. Those who are careful to keep the Torah's dietary laws are shomer kashrut. Those who are careful to behave appropriately with members of the opposite gender are shomer negiah. And those who are generally observant are called shomer Torah u'mitzvot. In this context, the word 'shomer' is usually understood as 'guard' i.e., one who carefully guards the laws of Shabbat, kashrut etc. We can now use the alternative translation of 'shomer' in these cases and examine the results.

**Shomer Shabbat:** The Ohr HaChaim applies this alternative meaning of 'shomer' to Shabbat.<sup>7</sup> The Torah itself instructs us to guard the Shabbat.<sup>8</sup> However, the Ohr HaChaim explains that, as well as just guarding Shabbat and observing the halachot, we should wait for and eagerly anticipate the coming of Shabbat.

We can fulfil this throughout the week in a number of ways. In Hebrew we call the days of the week by their number (Yom Rishon, Yom Sheni etc.) as we count up towards Shabbat. So every time we mention a day of the week we are reminded of Shabbat. The six days of the week are the time that we spend buying what we need for Shabbat and attending to other preparations. As we get closer to Shabbat, our focus on the holy day should increase. On Friday we should ideally spend much of the day focused on preparing for Shabbat<sup>9</sup>.

Rav Yaakov Labinsky suggests a novel way of bringing Shabbat into our week. When we do one of the melachot that are forbidden on Shabbat, we should consciously think (or even say) that this melacha is now *permitted* because it is *not* Shabbat. In this way, we can spend the whole week being conscious of Shabbat and eagerly anticipating its arrival.

**Shomer kashrut:** This is a tricky one. How can we eagerly anticipate keeping kosher? Perhaps we can look forward to a fancy meal at a kosher restaurant. Here's another idea. I heard the following conversation a few years ago:

Person 1: "Oh no, I forgot that I'm still fleishig and I just made myself a milchig coffee. I hate being fleishig and having to remember."

Person 2: "I know someone who *looks forward* to being fleishig. It means that he has to watch the clock and be constantly aware of his status. This forces him to focus on the halacha and feel more connected to Hashem. What a level to be on!"

**Shomer negiah:** One who is shomer negiah is guarding themselves from improper behaviour. They are also eagerly anticipating the proper time and the right person to marry.

**Shomer Torah and Mitzvot:** When we are involved in mundane activities, we may not feel connected to our Judaism. It is hard to think of Hashem when we are in the middle of a stressful meeting at work, trying to get the kids ready for school or doing the weekly shop. Even though halacha should touch every area of our lives, and there is no time that we should be disconnected from Hashem, in reality it is not always easy to keep this focus.

Perhaps we can try the following. When we are caught up in our day to day lives, instead of looking forward to a materialistic pleasure like sleep or chocolate, perhaps we can try to look forward to a spiritual pleasure such as our next opportunity to attend a shiur or learn some Torah. If a chag is coming up (and there is almost always a chag coming up) we can anticipate and look forward to it and the special mitzvot and activities that are connected to that chag.

Another idea is to keep a small Torah book we enjoy reading with us to pull out when we have a spare moment. Then we can eagerly anticipate reading another page when we next have a moment.

Of course, we must all be busy guarding Hashem's Torah and his mitzvot. But as well as that, we can also work on increasing our eager anticipation to practice and learn Hashem's Torah too.

Let's try something this week:

1. During the week, try to regularly think of Shabbat and do something to prepare for the upcoming special day.
2. Which chag is coming up next? Try to plan for and eagerly anticipate the next festival in the Jewish calendar.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>7</sup> Rav Chaim ben Moshe ibn Attar, he discusses this idea in his commentary to Parashat Ki Tisa, Shmot 31:16.

<sup>8</sup> See for example Shmot 31:14 (ושמרתם את השבת) and 31:16 (ושמרו בני ישראל את השבת).

<sup>9</sup> Especially in Israel where many people do not work on Friday, or at least on Friday afternoon.