



REBBETZIN SHIRA SMILES

FACULTY, OU ISRAEL CENTER

Shabbat Specialness

“Ach et *shabtotai* tishmoru ki ot hi beini u’beineichem le’doroteichem lada’at ki ani Hashem mekadishchem — Only keep My **Sabbaths!** For it is a sign [of distinction] between Me and you for your generations, to know that I, Hashem, make you holy.” (*Shemot 31:13*) The commentators find this language surprising, as there is only one day of Shabbat each week; it therefore should have been written in the singular form, not the plural! How can we understand this in a way that is relevant and meaningful?

The simple interpretation is that of the *Ramban*. This verse refers to the entire year, during which we celebrate many *Shabbatot*. The *Ohr Hachayim Hakadosh* notes that it includes all occasions that we call Shabbat, like Yom Kippur and the festivals in general. We must guard all of these holy times with care.

The *Beit Halevi al haTorah* develops this

idea, and notes that the Torah offers two perspectives within its mandate to keep Shabbat. One aspect is to recall that Hashem created the world in six days, and rested on the seventh, investing the day with an elevated holiness. The other aspect is to recall the exodus from Egypt, which established us as Hashem’s chosen nation, investing within us a singular *kedushah*. This is the aspect alluded to in our verse — Shabbat is a sign of distinction between Hashem and us, His people. Shabbat is a reminder to all of us that we are a unique nation and we have a special relationship with Hashem. The festivals are also reminders of the Exodus and, as a result, of our special *kedushah* as well. Therefore, the word “*Shabbatot*” in our verse includes both Shabbat and the festivals as they share this common theme.

The *Netivot Shalom* shares a fascinating insight based on the distinctions between these two beliefs. In the Shabbat kiddush and *tefilot* we use the expression, “*yom hashevi’i*” to signify the aspect of creation, as in the first paragraph of the Friday night kiddush, “*Vayachulu hashamayim ve’ha’aretz vechol tzeva’am veyechal Elokim bayom hashevi’i melachto asher asa* — Now the heavens and the earth were completed and all their host. And G-d completed on **the seventh day** His work that He did.” (*Bereisheet 2:1-2*) However, when referring to the special relationship we have with Hashem beginning from the Exodus, we employ the term “Shabbat,” as in the second paragraph of kiddush, “*ki banu bacharta ve’otanu kidashta mi’kol ha’amim ve’Shabbat*

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kadshecha be'avahavah u'veratzon hinchaltanu — for you chose us and sanctified us from all the nations and Your holy Shabbat with love and pleasure You bequeathed to us..." Similarly, the Friday night *tefilot* repeatedly use the term "*yom hashevi'i*" but the daytime *tefilot* are replete with the word "Shabbat." "*Yom hashevi'i*" is the universal aspect of Shabbat, while "Shabbat" is the particularistic aspect, reflecting our special relationship with Hashem.

The *Ketav V'Hakablah* offers yet another explanation, noting that Shabbat is written in the plural since each Shabbat contains two distinct elements. Shabbat is a time of rest, a cessation of physical work, and allows us time to rest internally and focus on our spiritual growth and connection; the physical pause giving us the space to do the spiritual work.

Rav Pincus *zt"l* offers a powerful *mashal* to help us relate to this aspect of Shabbat Kodesh in a very real way. Imagine a newly married couple in the first moments after the *chuppah*, standing together in the *cheder yichud*. The chatan turns to his new bride and says, "Dear kallah, I haven't checked the stock market or box scores today, give me a few minutes to see what's going on and then I'll spend time with you." We would all agree that this would be highly inappropriate, a gross interference with the couple's anticipated intimacy and closeness, and ultimately with their relationship. Shabbat Kodesh is our opportunity to intimately connect with the Divine. If we can see it thus, Shabbat will indeed be the expression of our unique relationship with Hashem. ■


Mazal Tov to


Rita & Menachem Broner and family on the birth of a grandson





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