YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

**Rav Yishai Jeselsohn**

**PARASHAT KI TISA**

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**Dedicated in memory of**

**Elliott Horowitz z"l**

**Elimelech Shimon ben Shraga HaLevi**

**whose Yahrzeit is 20 Adar**

**by the Horowitz Family**

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**The Making of Shabbat**

**I. The Fixed Nature of Shabbat**

The section dealing with Shabbat in our *parasha* includes a unique and fascinating concept. In addition to keeping Shabbat, the people of Israel are commanded to "make Shabbat":

And the children of Israel shall keep [*ve-shamru*]the Shabbat, to make the Shabbat [*la'asot et ha-Shabbat*]throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. (*Shemot* 31:16)

This commandment is especially puzzling in light of the words of the Gemara in tractate *Beitza*. The Gemara reports a disagreement about the appropriate conclusion of the blessing to sanctify the day when Yom Tov falls on Shabbat. The blessing of a regular Yom Tov ends with the words "who sanctifies Israel and the appointed times," putting Israel before the appointed times; when Yom Tov falls on Shabbat, at what point in the blessing should Shabbat be mentioned?

A *Tanna* taught before Ravina: "Who sanctifies Israel and Shabbat and the appointed times." He said to him: Does Israel sanctify Shabbat? Shabbat has already been sanctified [from the creation] and so continues! Say rather: "Who sanctifies Shabbat, Israel, and the appointed times." (*Beitza* 17a)[[1]](#footnote-1)

In contrast to the festivals, the dates of which are fixed by Israel through the court’s designation of each month, Shabbat is fixed and set from the time of creation. Thus, to return to our verse: it would be appropriate to say about the days of Yom Tov that Israel "makes" them. But how is it appropriate to say this about Shabbat, which was permanently fixed from the time of creation?

The *Or Ha-Chaim* offers many ways to understand this verse, each of carries the fragrance of Shabbat and can implant within us something of the importance and centrality of the day. In this *shiur*, we will touch on four of these interpretations and try to learn from them about the importance and preciousness of the holy Shabbat and our central role in "making" it.

**II. Remembering Shabbat**

Perhaps the Torah commands that they should guard [*yishmeru*] against stumbling intoa mistake about the day,in order that they should make the day of Shabbat according to its truth. This is what it says: “ And the children of Israel shall keep [*ve-shamru*]the Shabbat” in order “to make the Shabbat” that is known, so that they not come to a mistake…. (*Or Ha-Chaim* 31:16)

In his first explanation, the *Or Ha-Chaim* suggests that we should see the commandment appearing here as obliging one to remember which day is Shabbat. This obligation appears already in the words of *Chazal*, in Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira's explanation of the mitzva of "remember the day of Shabbat," which was given at Mount Sinai:

"Remember" – Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira said: From where do we derive that when you count [the day], count the first day of Shabbat/the week, the second day of Shabbat/the week, the third day of Shabbat/the week, the fourth day of Shabbat/the week, the fifth day of Shabbat/the week, and Shabbat eve? Therefore, the verse teaches: "Remember." (*Mekhilta de-Rashbi* 20:8)

According to Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira, the practical expression of the mitzvato remember Shabbat occurs not on Shabbat itself, but on the other days of the week, in preparation for Shabbat. The author of *Sefer Chareidim* discusses this further:

The Ramban wrote that this verse includes two *mitzvot.* First: *Kiddush* on Friday night, for *Chazal* expounded from the words "to keep it holy" [*le-kadesho*] that one must mention it with one's mouth and sanctify it when it first enters. *Le-kadesho* is understood in the sense of *kiddush beit din*, sanctification of the court, that they would sanctify the month and the jubilee year and say: It is sanctified, it is sanctified. The second mitzva, which is the essence of the verse, is to remember the day of Shabbat every day of the week, in all of a person's affairs where it can be mentioned. As it is stated in the *Mekhilta*,that the nations call each day of the week by a separate name, Lunae, Martis, Mercurii, as is the custom of the people who have become intermingled with the nations. But the mitzvaof our God in this verse is to call them the first day of Shabbat/the week, the second day of Shabbat/the week, the third day of Shabbat/the week, the fourth day of Shabbat/the week, the fifth day of Shabbat/the week, the sixth day of Shabbat/the week. And in every similar manner, we are to observe the mitzva of remembering Shabbat every day [of the week]. (*Sefer Chareidim*, positive commandments performed with the mouth)

The *Kaf Ha-Chaim* (132, 16) writes that the mitzvaof remembering Shabbat is the foundation and reason for saying "today is such-and-such day" before reciting the psalm of the day each day. Remembering Shabbat on the other days of the week is necessary for two different reasons, both of which focus on the same principle. The Ibn Ezra explains that there is concern that a person will forget about Shabbat and come to perform a prohibited labor:

"Remember the day of Shabbat" – A person must remember every day the reckoning of the days of the week, so that he not forget which is the seventh day, which he must sanctify. "To make it holy" – to make it superior to all the other days, that he not perform labor on it. (Ibn Ezra, *Shemot* 20:8)

If a person does not count the days of the week that are directed toward Shabbat, it is possible that he will err and come to perform a forbidden labor on the real day of Shabbat.

The Seforno mentions another aspect of the need to remember the day of Shabbat:

"Remember the day of Shabbat" – Always remember [*zakhor*]the day of Shabbat in your affairs on the days of action. The term *zakhor* is like: "Remember [*zakhor*] what Amalek did to you" (*Devarim* 25:17), and "Keep [*shamor*] the month of Aviv" (*Devarim* 16:1). "To make it holy." You must do this so that you will be able to make it holy. The Torah admonished that a person should arrange his affairs on the [six] days of action, in such a way that he can remove his mind from them on the day of Shabbat. (Seforno, *Shemot* 20:8)

According to the Seforno, the commandment to remember Shabbat comes not [only] to prevent mistakes, but so that a person will plan his entire week and ensure that on the seventh day, he will truly rest from his affairs.

In this first explanation, the *Or Ha-Chaim* relates to the “making” of Shabbat as realistic preparation, so that in practice, one will not forget about Shabbat and will be able to rest on it. In this way, man is able to fulfill God’s commandment in the best possible manner.

**III. The Longing for Shabbat**

In another explanation, the *Or Ha-Chaim* goes up a notch; here, the verse is no longer speaking merely of physical preparation for Shabbat:

It further alludes to what the Torah says, "but his father kept [*shamar*] the matter in mind" (*Bereishit* 37:11), meaning, he waited and looked forward to when it would happen – and the intent in this is to command that Shabbat should not be considered a burden because of the labors that are forbidden; rather one must rejoice in it, with full will and desire for it, and always eagerly await and look forward to it. The words "to make Shabbat" come to negate desiring the mitzvaof Shabbat as rest for the body and indulgence in delights. The basic purpose of Shabbat is to actively fulfill the mitzvaof Shabbat, not for the purpose of the senses. (*Or Ha-Chaim*, *Shemot* 31:16)

The *Or Ha-Chaim* relates first to the beginning of the verse, "and the children of Israel shall keep." According to its plain sense, the *shemira* here refers to abstention from work, but the *Or Ha-Chaim* understands it in the sense of waiting and looking forward to something, as we find regarding Yaakov that he looked forward to Yosef's dreams being fulfilled.

Looking forward to Shabbat is not self-evident, since it is a day when a person cannot perform his usual actions, do his work, and increase his wealth. Therefore, a person is liable to hate the day and merely wait for it to be over. The Torah commands us to be excited about Shabbat and eagerly wait for it to arrive.

However, the Torah is not satisfied with that. Looking forward to Shabbat may stem from the fact that Shabbat is a vacation day, a day of idleness and rest, when a person busies himself with pleasure and delight. This looking forward to Shabbat is better than not looking forward to Shabbat at all, but it is not the ultimate purpose*.* According to the *Or Ha-Chaim*, the Torah here goes on to clarify for us the content and essence of the proper eagerness for Shabbat: "to make Shabbat," that is, to await the fulfillment of the *mitzvot* of Shabbat, not the rest and pleasures of the day.

In order to properly understand the words of the *Or Ha-Chaim*, one must ask: Surely, the mitzvaof Shabbat is to refrain from doing work. If looking forward to Shabbat does not relate to that, then what does it relate to?

If I properly understand the words of the *Or Ha-Chaim*, it seems that those who see Shabbat merely as a day of pleasure meant exclusively for that miss the main point of Shabbat. It is true that the purpose of Shabbat is rest, but the goal is not simply that a person should receive a "break" from his labor. The previous verses in our *parasha* point to a tension as to whether Shabbat is intended for man or for God:

You shall keep Shabbat, for it is **holy** **to you**… but on the seventh day is a Shabbat of solemn rest, **holy** **to the Lord.** (*Shemot* 31:14-15)

In order to understand to whom Shabbat is directed, let us go back to its origin and the beginning of its sanctity. In *Parashat Bereishit*, even before man is commanded to rest on Shabbat, we learn about the holiness associated with that day:

And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it; because in it He rested from all His work which God in creating had made. (*Bereishit* 2:3)

The fact that the sanctity of Shabbat was already fixed and established before man was placed on earth indicates that the commandment given to man to rest on Shabbat follows from the day being holy to God. This is also alluded to in the first of the verses dealing with Shabbat in our *parasha*:

And you, speak also to the children of Israel, saying: You shall keep My *Shabbatot*, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. (*Shemot* 31:13)

Shabbat was meant to be a sign between the people of Israel and God. The goal is that the people of Israel should know that it is God who sanctifies them.[[2]](#footnote-2) This is how Rabbi S. R. Hirsch explains the obligation to rest from work on Shabbat:

Now the fourth utterance, "remember," returns us to the distant path, to the time when God established a memorial to Creation immediately after He first set up man to be His representative as "servitor and guardian" of the world (*Bereishit* 2:15). Shabbat is the memorial established to ensure this recognition, the forgetting of which became the cause of the downward path along which the development of human history was leading the world; Israel was then chosen to be God's herald in leading it upward again. (Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, *Shemot* 20:8)

The mitzvaof Shabbat was given with the word "remember" because its purpose is to remind man that the world has a Creator and Guide. Therefore, resting from work is meant not for man, but just the opposite: it is meant to bring him to an understanding of his smallness and of his place in relation to God. A person who desists from work on Shabbat for the sake of his rest does the complete opposite; instead of understanding that he is God’s handiwork in the world, and being motivated to fulfill his role and purpose during the days of the week, he sees himself as the ultimate end.

Looking forward to fulfilling the *mitzvot* of Shabbat must involve anticipation of the deep recognition of and faith in the Creator that can be drawn from Shabbat, not just the bodily strength that can be derived from a day of rest.

In this explanation, the *Or Ha-Chaim* teaches us about the conceptual and spiritual content of Shabbat, in which, of course, man's action (*asiya*) has significant impact.

**IV. Adding from the Mundane to the Holy**

It further alludes to what *Chazal* said (*Yoma* 81b), that one must add from the mundane [=the weekday] to the holy [=Shabbat], that is, that one must not abstain from labor only from when the day of Shabbat arrives, but rather one must prepare himself for the sanctity of Shabbat, and go out like a groom to his bride, and sit and wait for the arrival of Shabbat; “to make it,” meaning, to perform the actions needed for it.

"To make Shabbat" also means that what one adds from the mundane to the holy, God agrees to call it Shabbat. Thus, it turns out that this person literally makes Shabbat, because the hours before Shabbat and also the hours after Shabbat which are mundane, the people of Israel turn them into Shabbat. (*Or Ha-Chaim*, *Shemot* 31:16)

In this third explanation, the *Or Ha-Chaim* interprets the concept of "making" in its literal sense. A Jew truly has the power to impose the sanctity of Shabbat. How so? By way of the law of adding to Shabbat.

The Gemara learns in several places (*Yoma* 81b; see there) that it is possible (and perhaps even obligatory) to add from the mundane to the holy – that is, to begin the practices of Shabbat and the prohibition of work even before sunset, the time when heaven and nature dictate that Shabbat begins. The *Rishonim* disagree about the nature of this addition, and their dispute finds expression in a halakhic question raised by the *Terumat Ha-Deshen* in responsum no. 248.[[3]](#footnote-3) In that responsum, Rabbi Yisrael Isserlein discusses a woman who performed a *hefsek tahara*, making sure that her menstrual bleeding had stopped, after the congregation already recited the evening service. The fundamental question is: Has the day changed or not? Was her *hefsek tahara* on Friday afternoon or on Shabbat? We are dealing here with a profound question regarding the addition to Shabbat. During the time of the addition, has the day of Shabbat really begun, or is it only that the person began to abstain from forbidden labor, as only God can begin a new day at sunset?

The *Or Ha-Chaim* understands here that the people of Israel actually create Shabbat, a position that has several consequences. One of them is brought by the *Tosafot* in *Pesachim* (99b), in the name of the Ri of Corbeil, that one can fulfill his obligation to eat three meals on Shabbat with a meal eaten during the period added to Shabbat. The meals that must be eaten on Shabbat are learned by the Gemara (*Shabbat* 119a) from the appearance of the word "today" [*ha-yom*] three times in connection with the manna, and the plain understanding is that this is a law connected to the essence of the day. But the Ri of Corbeil understands that the day of Shabbat begins before sunset, when it is sanctified as such by the people of Israel.

According to this explanation, the "making" of Shabbat relates not only to a person's mental preparation for Shabbat, but rather to the actual making of Shabbat. Israel's ability to maneuver and determine the reality of Shabbat is more limited than its ability to determine the times of the festivals, but it does exist.

**V. Completing Shabbat**

In our fourth and final of the *Or Ha-Chaim*’s interpretations, he goes up one notch further and explains how, without Israel, Shabbat is incomplete:

The wording may also allude to what *Chazal* said (*Bereishit Rabba* 11) that Shabbat said to the Holy One, blessed be He: To all the other days You have given a partner, but to me You did not give a partner. He said to it: Surely, Israel [is your partner.] Thus far the *midrash*. We see from here that Shabbat lacked a detail to make it complete, and its repair is through Israel’s observance of it. This is the meaning of “And the children of Israel shall keep [*ve-shamru*]the Shabbat" – What is the reason? – “To make the Shabbat [*la'asot et ha-Shabbat*]” – a term of repair, for in this way, the making of Shabbat will be repaired, and a mate will be found for it. (*Or Ha-Chaim*, *Shemot* 31:16)

We already mentioned above that the section dealing with Shabbat ends with the determination that Shabbat is a sign between Israel and God – a sign that finds expression in the juxtaposition of Shabbat to the sanctuary, but also in this explanation of the *Or Ha-Chaim.* If indeed we are dealing here with a covenant between Israel and God, the covenant needs two sides. The fact that God established Shabbat does not complete the covenant as long as Israel does not keep Shabbat.

My revered teacher, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein *zt”l*, proposed a similar idea in the wake of the somewhat difficult words in the text of the *Musaf* prayer: *am mekadeshei shevi'i –* "a people who sanctify the seventh day." As stated earlier, the people of Israel do not sanctify Shabbat! Rabbi Lichtenstein explained that Israel adds to the sanctity of Shabbat[[4]](#footnote-4) by keeping it, and thus Shabbat is holier.

Comparing Israel and Shabbat to “partners” represents the connection that Shabbat symbolizes between Israel and God, who are also likened to husband and wife. The connection between a man and a woman, by its very definition, must include two sides; only then will the relationship be complete.

According to this, Israel's observance of Shabbat essentially completes Shabbat. God rested on the seventh day knowing that from that time on, every seventh day, Israel would remember anew the creation of the world and the fact that God is present even now that the world was already created and continues to exist. Without Israel's observance of Shabbat, there is indeed a holy day, but it is empty.

Thus, according to this explanation, the "making" of Shabbat was not only during a limited period of time; rather, the entire nature and essence of Shabbat changes in accordance with its observance each week.

**Conclusion**

We saw how the *Or Ha-Chaim* offers four explanations, four different ways to "make" our *Shabbatot*. We saw that we can open up Shabbat when we come to it ready and prepared both physically and spiritually. In addition, we discussed our ability to truly add additional hours of Shabbat in our annual calendar and how our observance of Shabbat actually shapes the entire Shabbat in a different way.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. See also *Pesachim* 117b. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For a similar idea, see *Meshekh Chokhma*, *Shemot* 20:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Rema, *Yoreh De'a* 196:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Ramban on the mitzva of remembering Shabbat, *Shemot* 20:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)