

The Land of Israel in the Parsha & Our Lives

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Vayakhel Why Is Shabbat Observance the Key to Israel's Protection?

What Makes Shabbat the Heart of My Torah Journey?

Everything on my journey in the Torah world has revolved around Shabbat. In my search for truth, it was lighting my first Shabbat candles that truly brought me home. I still remember my very first Shabbat at the Diaspora Yeshiva in the Old City in 1980. I was led to a room where two silver candlesticks awaited me. An older student gently guided me through the blessing, and as I lit the candles, something profound happened. The glow of the Shabbat lights transformed the world before me. The room radiated holiness and serenity, as though I had entered a higher realm of existence. In that moment, I realized that the expanded consciousness I had been seeking all along was right here, within my own tradition. I had never expected to find such clarity in what had always been mine. For the first time, I saw truth—not as something distant, but as something to which I deeply belonged. I would continue learning, exploring, and growing alongside others on the same path. I had finally come home. Shabbat also led me to my husband. He first noticed me as we crossed paths – he was leaving the dining hall with the guys just as I arrived for the girls' lunch hour. When a yeshiva couple later asked him if there was anyone he would like to meet, he mentioned me. And so, we were introduced at their Shabbat table. After the meal, he walked me home, and from that night on, our daily walks through the Old City became our own journey. We traced every arch and winding gateway, discovering the roads that led not just through Jerusalem but to each other's hearts. After just five months at the yeshiva, we announced our engagement. We were one of many couples married under the magnificent chuppah, hand-woven by the women of the yeshiva, its fabric adorned with the symbols of the twelve tribes. In what felt like a whirlwind, I was transformed – from a girl experiencing her first Shabbat to an observant Jewish woman who would provide so many others with their first Shabbat experience.

Why Is Observing Shabbat in the Land of Israel the Ultimate Spiritual Experience?

I am not alone in experiencing the profound connection between the holiness of Shabbat and the sanctity of the Land of Israel. Nowhere else have so many of us encountered the same elevated dimension of Shabbat as in Eretz Yisrael. While Shabbat reflects the holiness of time, the Land of Israel embodies the holiness of space. When these two dimensions of sanctity intersect, they create a spiritual gateway beyond time and space. Since the pinnacle of holiness in space is the Beit HaMikdash (Temple), it is no wonder that my early Shabbat experiences in the Old City of Jerusalem – overlooking the Temple Mount – remain unforgettable. Rav Kook expresses this idea beautifully: “The holiness of space fills the entire world, yet it remains hidden and invisible. The secret waves of holiness push endlessly forth towards their destined revelation until they find expression through the Land of Israel, the pinnacle of all the dust of the universe, and from there to the holy spot, the Holy Temple, and the Rock of Foundation – ‘Out of Zion, the epitome of beauty, God has appeared’” (*Orot HaKodesh*, Vol. 2, p. 303, *The illumination of holiness in the world*). Similarly, Rav Kook explains that Shabbat serves as the wellspring from which all sacred moments flow: “The holiness of time spreads across eternity... until it is revealed at the holy times, through the holiness of Shabbat, which is the origin of all the holy times and emanates with holiness toward the entire world and toward Israel” (*Ibid.*). Thus, observing Shabbat in the Land of Israel elevates our spiritual experience, as both Shabbat and the Land embody a state of holiness and rest reflecting ultimate Divine unity. This synergy deepens our connection to Hashem, amplifying the sanctity inherent in both time and space.

How does Keeping Shabbat in the Land Align Us With the Cosmic Rhythm of Holiness?

Parashat *Vayakhel* opens with a mitzvah to observe Shabbat:

ספר שמות פרק לה פסוק ב

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִהְיֶה לָּכֶם קֹדֶשׁ שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן לַיהוָה כָּל הָעֵשָׂה בּוֹ מְלָאכָה יוֹמָת:

“Six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day, a day of complete rest to Hashem; whoever performs work thereon [on this day] shall be put to death” (*Shemot* 35:2).

The juxtaposition of Shabbat and the Mishkan teaches that while building a dwelling place for Hashem is sacred, it must not override the sanctity of Shabbat (*Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat* 49b). Similarly, the Land of Israel is deeply tied to Shabbat observance. The Torah refers to the land as “the land of your inheritance הַנְּחִלָּה/*hanachala*” (*Devarim* 12:9). Likewise, we call Shabbat an inheritance at the end of Friday night Kiddush: הַנְּחִלָּתָנוּ וּבְרָצוֹן הַנְּחִלָּתָנוּ /*b’ahavah uv’ratzon hinchaltanu* - “In love and favor You have given us Your holy Shabbat as an inheritance.” This profound relationship encourages a holistic approach to spirituality, where honoring Shabbat and cherishing the Land of Israel are seen as complementary paths to deepening our bond with the Divine. Engaging in Shabbat observance within the land not only fulfills mitzvot but also aligns us with the cosmic rhythm of holiness that defines Jewish people. Through these lenses, Shabbat and the Land of Israel are not merely mitzvot to observe or places to inhabit. They are intertwined dimensions of sanctity that deepen our connection with Hashem, drawing us into a more harmonious relationship with the Divine.

Why Does Shabbat Observance Protect the Land of Israel?

Shabbat observance and the Land of Israel are equally central in our relationship with Hashem. They are intrinsically connected, as both are called *menucha* (rest): “He (G-d) rested on the seventh day” (*Shemot* 20:11); “For you have not yet come to the resting place (*menucha*) and the inheritance” ... referring to the land of Israel (*Devarim* 12:9). True rest – both physical and spiritual – can only be achieved on Shabbat in Eretz Yisrael. The Torah promises that if the Jewish people will preserve the *menucha* of Shabbat, then Hashem will protect us in the Land. Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein emphasizes the significance of Shabbat, particularly in challenging times when our existence in the Land of Israel is threatened. He notes that Shabbat observance is directly linked to our ability to dwell peacefully in the land, citing the verse from Yeshayahu: “If you proclaim the Shabbat a delight... then you shall be granted pleasure with Hashem, and I shall mount you astride the heights of the land; and I will provide you the heritage of your forefather, Ya’acov” (*Yeshayahu* 58:13-14). Rabbi Zilberstein illustrates this connection with a parable from the Dubno Maggid, highlighting the consequences of neglecting Shabbat: The king had a minister he favored due to his wise wife. When the king saw she was mistreated, he decreed the minister’s execution, saying: “I only kept him alive because of his wife. Now that he mistreats her, what use do I have for him?” In the same way, Shabbat is our “queen,” and when she is neglected, Hashem’s protection over Israel weakens. The lesson is clear: strengthening our Shabbat observance secures our presence in the Land. Rabbi Zilberstein suggests learning two halachot of Shabbat daily and inviting others to experience an authentic Shabbat meal to inspire them. (Inspired by an Aish article: *The Guiding Light*, by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen). May we all merit to safeguard Shabbat and, in turn, be safeguarded in the Land of Israel!