

# GATHER THE PEOPLE

Torah-Based Community Organizing and Development

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## FAMILY SIDUR STUDY: LESSON PLAN 15

**WE'RE GOING TO CONTINUE TODAY ON PAGE 34 IN THE סידור.**

- Can someone tell us the name of the prayer at the top of the page?  
(וּשְׁמְרוּ)
- This word usually translated into English as “observe,” which ordinarily means standing back and simply looking at something.
- Remember, with almost every Hebrew word, no matter how many letters are in the word, three of those letters are the root or שׁוֹרֵשׁ of the word that tell us its basic meaning.
- ***But what's the שׁוֹרֵשׁ of this word?***
  1. The three root letters are ש-מ-ר.
  2. And the basic meaning of the שׁוֹרֵשׁ is to *protect* something, to watch over it so that nothing bad happens to it.
- ***And what is it that we're supposed to protect?***
- In other words, the prayer is not asking us to *observe* שְׁבַת but to *protect* שְׁבַת, which requires that we become actively involved somehow.

**WHERE DOES THIS PRAYER COME FROM? (Exodus 31:16-17)**

- So, because this prayer comes from the Torah, it's a מִצְוָה.
- ***What's the English word for מִצְוָה?***
- One way to think about a מִצְוָה is that it's something God wants us to *understand and do* for our own good.
- Here, in effect, the מִצְוָה *commands* that all of us Jews shall protect the שְׁבַת.
- But both God and we know we have free will, so we can ignore God's מִצְוָה, although we often end up being unhappy because of what happens when we do ignore them—like when we get caught lying or stealing, gossiping or being unkind to people.
- The מִצְוָה is like the *command* we receive from our parents when we're very young, to look both ways before we cross a street, which they tell us to protect us.
- God is giving us the gift of knowing that good things will happen for us if we follow the מִצְוָה and bad things will happen for us if we don't.

**SOMEONE PLEASE READ THE FIRST LINE OF THE PRAYER ON PAGE 34 IN HEBREW: וְשָׁמְרוּ בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת**

- ***How does the סידור translate those words into English?***
- “The people Israel”—actually the Hebrew says, בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל, the children of Israel, which is all of us Jews—“shall observe the שַׁבָּת.”
- Of course, we’re familiar with שַׁבָּת, but we have already seen that what’s needed is not to *observe* שַׁבָּת—like watching a barking dog or the rain coming down in a storm—but to *protect* it?

**HOW CAN WE PROTECT שַׁבָּת?**

- One way to figure out how to answer that question is to learn what the word שַׁבָּת means—that is, if we don’t already know.
- ***Does anyone know the meaning of the שׁוֹרֵשׁ for the word שַׁבָּת?***
- The שׁוֹרֵשׁ is ש-ב-ת, which means to stop work, whether schoolwork or work on a job.
- It means to stop all our usual activity, like when we’re creating things or fixing things of one kind or another.
- ***Does anyone know what we celebrate on שַׁבָּת when we stop doing everything we usually do?***
- We’re celebrating that our God not only had the absolute power to start the whole universe but also the power to stop it when it was completed—that God has free will, which God has given to us, unlike all the rest of the creatures on earth.
- In other words, the God we worship—that we pray to, sing about, depend on—is as real as we are, not a myth or a figment of our imagination, because we are created in the image or likeness of our creator, with free will.
- We have choices. We have the free-willed power to decide to do what’s right or what’s wrong.
- All this is well worth celebrating, unless we would prefer to have the life of a frog, a fish, a snake, a horse, or an eagle, none of which have free will.

**GETTING BACK TO PROTECTING SHABBAT:**

- ***What kind of bad things could happen to שַׁבָּת?***
- ***How can we protect over שַׁבָּת so that nothing bad happens to it?***
- Maybe we’ll get a better idea of how to protect שַׁבָּת if we go on to the next line in the prayer.
- Someone please read the second line in Hebrew for us.
- לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת לְדַרְתָּם בְּרִית עוֹלָם
- ***And how does the סידור, our prayerbook, translate those words?***

- “. . . to maintain it”—תַּשְׁבֵּת—“as an everlasting covenant through all generations.”
- In other words, we are to keep alive in ourselves, our children, and our children’s children, forever, the celebration that the God we worship and follow is real, all-powerful, and has given us the Torah so that together, using our free will, we can find our way in life.
- ***But what’s the “covenant” mentioned here?***
- A covenant is an agreement—like when we have an agreement that we will do certain work for someone and the person will pay us every week—but this is an agreement between God and the Jewish people that’s supposed to last forever.
- ***So what does the first word, “לַעֲשׂוֹת” mean?***
- ***How would we know the basic meaning of that word?***
- Of course, by knowing the meaning of the root letters or שׁוּרֶשׁ.
- In this case they’re a little harder to figure out because one of the root letters doesn’t even appear in this form of the word—which happens sometimes!
- But the root letters of לַעֲשׂוֹת are ה-ש-ע, which mean “to make” or “to do” something.
- So a better translation of the first word, לַעֲשׂוֹת, might be “to do” or “to make” תַּשְׁבֵּת.

**SO THIS PRAYER SAYS IN THE FIRST TWO LINES THAT WE ARE SUPPOSED TO PROTECT THE תַּשְׁבֵּת BY MAKING OR DOING THE תַּשְׁבֵּת!**

- ***What do you think that means?***
- If we *make* or *do* תַּשְׁבֵּת, most of all it becomes *unlike* the rest of the week because it becomes a time of kindness, love, peace, and beauty—freedom from the usual cares and anxieties we live with every weekday.
- ***How can you and your family make תַּשְׁבֵּת a time that’s totally unlike all the other days in the week—what could all of you do differently?***
- That’s not a question we need to answer right now, but one that should be asked and answered many times throughout our lives.

**BUT TO GET STARTED, LET’S MAKE A LIST OF HOW WE CAN MAKE OR DO תַּשְׁבֵּת.**

- ***How can we get ready for תַּשְׁבֵּת?***
- ***What can we do that’s special at the beginning of תַּשְׁבֵּת?***
- ***How should we act differently at תַּשְׁבֵּת meals?***
- ***What might we do on תַּשְׁבֵּת evening, morning, and afternoon, and when Shabbat is ending?***

- *What's one new thing from the list that you personally would like to do to make תבֿש what God wants it to be for us?*

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