



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Tzvi Cederbaum



When we as Jews classify our level of religiosity, oftentimes the term *Shomer Shabbat*, *Shomer Mitzvot*, or *Shomer* followed by some other word comes up. In general, this expression has come to mean that that person keeps the laws of *Shabbat*, *Mitzvot*, or whatever else the word *Shomer* precedes. Recently though, I have discovered a new definition of *Shomer* that changes everything about that phrase.

As we have been learning in Rav Binny's *Chumash* class, the first step that must be taken to uncover the meaning of a word is to find other places where it appears and see what it is translated as in that context. At the beginning of this week's *parsha*, *Parshat Vayeshev*, we find the past tense of *Shomer*, *Shamar*, (appearing for the first time in the Torah) in reference to Joseph's dreams. Joseph relates his second dream to his father Jacob, telling him all about how the stars and sun and moon bowed down to him. In 37:11, the Torah notes that while Joseph's brothers overhear this exchange and become jealous and hateful of him, Jacob has a different reaction. "*V'aviv Shamar et Hadavar* – but his father kept the matter in mind." At first glance, this seems to be congruent with our accepted translation, but *Rashi* thinks otherwise. He translates the above four words to mean that Jacob was anticipating and praying for the events of Joseph's dream to come true. Jacob knew through prophecy that Joseph was destined to be a savior for his family in Egypt and they would in fact all bow to him one day, and he was praying and waiting for that day to arrive. So in fact, what we commonly translate as simply "keep" actually means something along the lines of "to desire and anticipate." Taking this new translation into account, the entire essence of doing *mitzvot* drastically shifts from a mere observance to a joy and longing.

This strikes a chord with me personally because although I only discovered this definition of *Shomer* a short while ago, what it entails as far as observing *mitzvot* was in fact the very reason I came to Orayta in the first place. For most of my childhood, I viewed Judaism as a religion that told me all about what I wasn't allowed to do. It was only after high school, a year in *Yeshiva*, and a drastic change of scenery and perspective that I decided I had a problem that needed solving: I wanted to feel happy about being Jewish, not oppressed; I wanted to *want* to be Jewish. My journey led me to Orayta, where the why of Judaism is just as important, if not more important, than the what and the how.

What thrills me about this *Yeshiva*, among several other obvious “perks” such as living in the Old City of Jerusalem, is that I’m learning and experiencing that I can be happy being Jewish; that *davening* isn’t three interruptions in my day but an opportunity to converse with Hashem; that *Shabbat* isn’t a boring day that I can’t do anything on but a day to be *mesameach* in the joy of Judaism and the glory of Hashem. These are only a few examples of course, but the possibilities are endless, and I think this is the first step to really being *Shomer Mitzvot*. If a Jew is joyful in Judaism and understands what it really means to be Jewish, he anticipates with great desire every opportunity to do a *mitzvah* because it is another opportunity to serve Hashem. From happiness is born devotion, and that’s what being *Shomer Mitzvot* really means.

Chanukah has almost arrived, and we can learn a great lesson from the *Chanukah* story in light of what we now know *Shomer* means. It is hard to say what the main miracle of *Chanukah* is, but certainly the one that everyone knows is that one sealed jug of oil was found amongst all the unsealed (and therefore impure) ones, and it lasted for eight days even though there was only enough oil for one day. The puzzling thing about this is that if I was the commander of the Greek battalion that raided the *Beit Hamikdash* and I wanted to make the oil impure, I would have simply told the soldiers to topple the shelves with the oil jugs. They would all break and spill on the floor and that would be the end of it. From the story though, we see this is not what happened. The Maccabees found one *sealed* jug of oil amid all the *unsealed*, impure ones. The Greeks didn’t topple the shelves, they went through the jugs with malicious precision, individually unsealing each one and making it impure. They were so dead set on obliterating Judaism that they actually went through the jugs of oil and made them impure one by one instead of simply taking care of it quickly. Unfortunately for them, they missed a jug and the *Chanukah* miracle occurred, but the Greeks’ act is a paradigm of the way the enemies of Judaism fight us and we as Jews would do well to learn from that example. This way of acting is being *Shomer* as well: *Shomer* wickedness. This type of fanatical devotion that we have faced in the past is the same that we continue to face today, and the only way to combat it is to be devoted to Judaism in the same way. We must be *Shomer* as well, *Shomer Mitzvot*, *Shomer Shabbat*, *Shomer* Judaism.

Shabbat Shalom

Tzvi attended DRS Yeshiva High School in Woodmere, Long Island. He enjoys playing guitar, baseball and football. He’s the eldest of 5 children and is the elder statesman of the Orayta being the oldest student.

What Tzvi loves most about Orayta is: the warm atmosphere here. Everybody cares about each other. The Rebbeim are really interested in our lives. They are more than just teachers; they’re mentors and friends.