

The Gift of Shabbat

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Have you ever drawn a picture, work really hard on it, but end up being disappointed by it? This happened to Noam, an experienced artist, and this is his story.

Friday. Noam is once again staring at the figure of the girl that he's painted, and she, like yesterday and the day before, stares back at him with empty eyes. "This painting has no life. It's boring!" says Noam with frustration. What now? Should he give up? Start another painting? Noam picks up his brush again. He adds a necklace to the girl in the painting and then erases the necklace. He adds curls to the girl's hair and then removes them. He paints turquoise buttons on the girl's blouse and then paints over them in white. "I'm just wasting my time!" he says, pushing his pallet aside angrily. He turns the painting around to face the wall.

But the girl in the painting has a hold on him. Noam's thoughts keep going back to her. He returns the painting to the easel and considers it for a long time. Nothing comes to mind. It is as if his mind is an engine that has shut down. He is exhausted. Suddenly, Noam realizes that it's hard to make out the girl's facial features. He gazes out of the window; the sun is beginning to set – it will soon be Shabbat!

Noam gives his painting one last glance, sighs, and leaves his studio, closing the door behind him.

At home, they were already expecting him. When he came in, Roey asked, "Abba, do you want to play cards?" "Definitely!" Noam replied, "give me ten minutes."

A quick shower, hot water and soap, to scrub and remove the paint from his hands. Roey is already dealing the cards.

Shabbat has its own pace. In Noam, Anna, and Roey's home it begins with lighting the candles as a family and, tonight, a game of cards. Afterwards, two golden challahs, Anna's chicken soup, roasted potatoes, and chocolate cake. Everyone is chatting, and Noam puts his thoughts of the painting aside.

On Saturday, it is as if the family is floating on a boat through a river of quiet, but Noam's thoughts sometimes wander to his workshop and the painting of the girl. "Not now, this isn't the time!" Noam rebukes his own thoughts. "Oof! Just the thought of that painting exhausts me!"

But thoughts are hard to control. Determined to banish them and safeguard his Shabbat rest, Noam suggests taking a walk. The air, the trees, and jumping over puddles hand in hand with Roey all stopped Noam from thinking about the painting. They return home where Anna tells Roey a story and Noam settles into an enjoyable nap on the couch. Noam doesn't know that during those hours of rest – playing, eating, sleeping, walking with Roey, enjoying time with his family – Shabbat is quietly “cooking up” a gift for him, a gift he'll discover only when he returns to work after Shabbat.

Sunday morning, Noam wakes up feeling good and refreshed, with new energy pulsing through his body. He skips breakfast, grabs his jacket, and rushes out to his studio. Noam stands in front of the painting. Steps closer, steps back, squints his eyes, and suddenly sees it. He sees what he was unable to see on Friday. He sees what the exhaustion and weariness of six days of work had hidden from him. He sees that the painting is boring because the girl looks bored.

This thought pierces his head and bounces in his brain, round and round, and Noam starts painting without hesitation: He puts a little bear playing a drum in the girl's hands. He adjusts the angle of her gaze so that she is gazing just beyond the toy. He lightens her eyes with a touch of white, glowing and mischievous. He examines the painting: life pumps through the portrait of the girl.

Noam looks at his creation and gives thanks. To whom? For what? To Shabbat, of course – the Shabbat rest that had given him the gift of new thoughts and fresh ideas.

This story is based on the thought of Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan, which we expand on in the resource, "[Shabbat – Time to Contemplate Anew.](#)"