

Oneg The joy of Shabbat- YK 2023- 5784- Rabbi Andrea Merow

Rebbi Yehudah haNasi, the famous editor of the Mishna, served a feast on Shabbat for his friend Emperor Antoninus. He brought the emperor food that was cold, so as not to use fire on the Sabbath. Antoninus ate and found it exceedingly tasty. Then Rebbe Yehuda made a feast for him on a weekday and brought steaming hot, gourmet food. Antoninus said to Rebbi, the cold food on Shabbat tasted so much better than this hot food. Rebbi explained that the hot weekday food was missing a single, yet critical spice. Antoninus said to Rebbe, 'my friend, I can get you whatever spice you need. Rebbi Yehuda HaNasi replied, "The missing ingredient was the spice of Shabbat.

What is that "spice" called Shabbat? What are the elements that make this one day away such an enduring gift to humanity? It is hard to describe, but we can try. Mostly, we can experience it.

Last week on Rosh Hashana I said, don't go and *find yourself*, lose yourself. Lose yourself in something bigger and enduring. I stated that Jewish life is what is bigger. Tonight, I am drilling down on what I believe is the most significant way into the expansiveness of Jewish life. Loneliness and feelings of disconnectedness are epidemic in our society; Shabbat is the antidote. We are constantly running, running, running; Shabbat is the promise of a full stop, each week, a time to rejuvenate, to tend to our nefesh, our souls. We find ourselves distracted by our phones, our emails, our to-do list, and we are not present. Shabbat is Presence. In the hustle and bustle of our lives, we desperately need Shabbat. In the large outside worlds that we are each part of, we need the warmth of a tightknit Shabbat community. And Shabbat needs you to reanimate it, to make it that day of difference.

How often does the battery on your phone seem to run out? While you are speaking? Midday? Do have an electric car that needs to be charged? You find somewhere to recharge it. And you sit and recharge their batteries. How can you predict when your batteries need to be recharged? My mom of blessed memory wore hearing aids her entire life. When she no longer knew when to change the batteries on them, we, her kids, had them changed for her, like clockwork, once a week, if they needed it not. This way, we knew they would always have full charge.

We need that routine day of not working, a day apart, a day with special rituals, a day that is different to recharge.

By spending one whole day not creating, we free our bodies, our brains, our souls to create on the other 6 days.

On this, the holiest day of the year called, The Sabbath of Sabbaths, let's explore the idea of bringing Shabbat into your life in deeper and meaningful ways. Adding that spice of Shabbat to your life can be the single most important way to lose yourself in something bigger.

In 1988 Thomas Cahill wrote the book *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the way Everyone Thinks and Feels*. Cahill says the “innovation of the weekend, got its start in the Jewish Sabbath or (the) ceasing. “No ancient society before the Jews had a day of rest. The god who made the universe and rested bids us do the same, calling us to a weekly restoration of prayer, study and recreation or re-creation.”¹ The Sabbath, a real day of rest is our inheritance – we just need to own it.

In our Torah, the creation of the world was completed in 6 time periods. On the 7th, God ceased from creative activity, and was refreshed or re-souled. *U’vyom hashveiee Shavat vayinafash*. Rashi believes that after labor or work we need to calm our souls with a day of rest. Funny, it seems that Harvard Business Review agrees with the great Biblical commentator Rashi. Harvard Business Review speaks about how we need time for our brains to recover from thinking and working, and that American’s bring their work home too much in the evenings and weekends. Many of us are workaholics.² There is a popular rabbinic teaching that says we each get an extra soul on Shabbat. Rashi counters and says really, on Shabbat we get an expanded heart for rest and joy, open to comfort, food, drink, and joy.

In tomorrow’s haftara from Isaiah we read “Is this not the fast I have chosen...?” the prophet then enumerates that the fast is about our obligations to the downtrodden. We think we can stop here, that our obligation to take care of others is enough. But Isaiah continues, if you call the Sabbath a delight, an oneg, if you honor it, then that is the fast God is looking for.” The fast is about reminding ourselves to take care of others: the downtrodden, **and to take care of ourselves** by upfilling Shabbat in our lives. Shabbat is the original self-care.

Professor Yisrael Knoll goes so far as to say that Isaiah invented the idea of Oneg Shabbat. Not cookies on doilies, the idea that Shabbat should be a true delight.

How can you make Shabbat a delight in your home and here? How do we infuse our community with that sense of Oneg, joy and delight. If you want to know what I mean when I say oneg, joy, here is an example, think back to last week when a 6-year-old and her mom led many of you in dancing on Rosh Hashana – that oneg- that’s the delight and joy of Shabbat. I want dancing here every Shabbes! Oneg Shabbat is saving your new clothes to wear on Shabbes. Oneg is to open the better bottle of wine on Shabbat. Oneg, delight of Shabbat, is feeling God’s presence in deep prayer or song, or at a shabbes lunch table in conversation. Oneg Shabbat is the joy of inviting guests to your home for a Shabbat meal.

Our ancient rabbis believed that observing Shabbat was all about law, the 39 plus forbidden labors; these legal structures and strictures give the Sabbath a form, but law is not enough. As early as the 13th century the mystics understood that the Sabbath became too much about law, and not enough about the story of shabbat, the Delight, the oneg, the feeling of the day.

¹ Cahill, *The Gift of The Jews*, p. 144.

² <https://hbr.org/2016/06/resilience-is-about-how-you-recharge-not-how-you-endure>

Dr. Melila Helner Eshed, of Hebrew University and Hartman teaches that the project of the Zohar, the work of the mystics was to re-enchant all of Jewish life. The mystics re-enchanted the Sabbath. We must do this again; it is only 1000 years later.

They asked what could it mean to have true *Oneg*, joy and delight on and from the Sabbath? The Zohar returns to our haftara: “Rabbi Abba opened with the words of Isaiah, “if you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from engaging in your affairs on my holy day.” This day is made special by not doing our work on it. Not our work, our volunteer work, nor our shul business. It is radical but healing to say that one day every single week is about our souls being rejuvenated, reconnected to each other and to The Holy One. To not writing the email or doing the project, but to just being, breathing, rejoicing, prayer, song, food. Delighting.

The Zohar continues, “For the Sabbath is equal to all of the Torah, and if we observe the Sabbath it is like we have done all of Torah.” Truth.

If you, if we, can fill one day of the week with holiness, recreation, and re-creation. If this one day a week can be about our People, our spiritual lives, our families, the day where we Do Shabbat, where we come to this place, where we host meals, do no work, do no house work—just be – then yes to the mystics, Shabbat will not feel like it is about what you cannot do; it will be about *Oneg*, deep delight and having Shabbat, that full stop, the engagement in sacred community, as part of our routine each is a way to bring healing to ourselves and our world.

The mystics teach us that if we want to delight in God, we need to practice delighting in life, seeing the awe and splendor in creation, in the moment, in each other. Shabbes is our day to practice delighting in the world.

It is about heightened relationships with each other and with the Divine.

Shabbat for the mystics is a uniting of God’s indwelling Presence, the Shechinah, with us, and that is the ultimate experience of *Oneg* – joy. The mystics succeeded in reenchanting the Shabbat. They wrote *Lecha Dodi* about the Shabbat and Israel as two lovers, uniting; that’s the metaphor that we love to welcome Shabbat in song with each week. Lovers uniting. It is time to re-enchant the Shabbat again. It is time for our community to have the spice of Shabbat, and to build our Shabbes community.

True story: I was in class this summer, the professor asks the 180 rabbis where, if we had our choice, would we prefer to pray on a Friday night. I thought about the beautiful service that I love to attend at the port in Tel Aviv, facing the sea. 800 people singing *L’Cha Dodi*. Or, maybe at Kibbutz Ketura in the small desert shul where the ark is adorned with the words from Psalm 126,

שׁוֹבֵה יְהוָה אֶת־[שְׁבִיתָנוּ] כְּאֶפְיָקִים בְּנֶגֶב:

“Restore our fortunes Adonai, like water courses through the Negev desert.” But when it got to my turn to answer the words that came out of my mouth were, “I like to be at my shul in Princeton for Kabbalat Shabbat.” It is warm, festive and the people are lovely. And with that statement I became a bit of a unicorn. I am grateful to share the bima with Avi and sometimes musicians to lead with, I am grateful that people have started to return to services. I am grateful for the Oneg, the joy that we can create together.

So, what am I asking of you?

More Shabbat here. We are on the cusp of re-building, post pandemic, a wonderful Shabbat community here. But I need you. Our Fridays night and Saturday mornings are growing- and changing. If you used to come pre pandemic, come home. If you have not come recently, give yourself the gift of shabbat at shul with community. Choose Fri or Sat, try once or month, or more. Yes, the tunes change over time – you’ll get them. Shabbat is Jewish time, time to be here with each other.

Parents of young children: Right now, about 4 or so families with young children who come to Shabbat services on a regular basis. Your children are welcome in this room, on this bima. Come and make this your place. Every child in our community can feel at home in our sanctuary. Plan play dates and picnics on our grounds after.

New to the community and need a Shabbat group – we can create those. Our Religious committee will start a Shabbat home meal initiative this year. Let us know you can help.

I am inviting you to consider adding more Shabbat into your life. Start with one action. Remember the Sabbath by lighting candles, or coming here, or hosting meals at your home for friends.

And for those who already remember Shabbat in these ways, consider going all in for a few weeks, to experience a full 25 hours of stopping, of being in the world in a different way, of sacred community.

Be counter cultural: Consider the idea that Shabbat is not one event that you attend or create, Shabbat is a mindset of 25 hours of powering down and doing things differently. Work 24/6, not 24/7. Then, help us continue to create a culture of Oneg Shabbat, joyful shabbat, here at TJC:

Come, join us this week and have Shabbat dinner in our Sukkot. Or come in the morning. I promise that our prayer will never be mumble, mumble, mumble Amen. Come build our prayerful community. Or, be JFK, come just for Kiddush lunch, Shabbat meals are as much holy time as services are. Host one of our Friday night communal dinners. Come and play games, mahjong chess, gaga, use our playground. That too is part of the 25 hours of shabbat. Be, breathe, here, on Shabbat.

Host Cocktails in the Corridor, it's like an Oneg except it is a "pre-neg." Host or attend Shabbat dinners that our religious committee will set up this year in people's homes. Shabbat has 3 festive meals. Gather, light candles, bless your people, bless your food, eat challah, drink wine.

Spend time learning Torah on Shabbat, at Bible BaBoker, or sit in our Library and read. Or if not here, make Shabbat a time each week to learn something Jewish. Sit with us after a Shabbat meal and learn the songs that our great poets have given us for Shabbat.

Take a nap on Shabbat – you will never have better sleep.

Take a walk with loved ones – talk. Listen.

Be a part of how our community re-enchants and brings delights on the Sabbath.

Engage all of your senses: Begin your with candle lighting; end with Havdalah.

How do you want Shabbat to smell? Maybe of a clean home, flowers, warming challah.

Make special food. Add that special Shabbat spice to your life.

Have you read Sarah Hurwitz 2019 book called, *Here All Along: Finding Meaning, Spirituality and a Deeper Connection to Life – In Judaism (After Finally Choosing to Look There)*.

Sarah was successful political speech writer who described herself as a lapsed Jew. In her mid30s she found herself in an intro to Judaism class and realized that Judaism has so many gifts for us to unwrap. She writes:

"Seen through adult eyes, practices like Shabbat struck me as utterly brilliant and profoundly counter-cultural in a way that we desperately need right now. In our consumerist society which tells us that we never have enough money, possessions or success and we should just keep working harder and spending more, to have a tradition that insists that for 25 hours each week, we say, "No boss, I'm not going to answer your emails; no Facebook, I'm not going to sit around liking things, being advertised to, and feeling bad about my life. Instead, I'm actually going to spend time with my loved ones, stop trying to bend the world to my will, and actually appreciate what I have." That's pretty amazing."³

Shabbat Shalom, Shabbat Shalom (nigun)

³ Sarah Hurwitz, speech to Jewish Funders Network

