

Take a moment – and get comfortable – or at least as comfortable as one can be when fasting and sitting this close to our neighbors. If possible, plant your feet on the ground, put your shoulders back, close your eyes. Take some intentional breaths – in and out – in and out. Now I am going to share some images with you or ideas for images – that we will then piece together to find some meaning.

- Imagine yourself in your favorite place with your favorite people. Where are you? What makes this place special? What ties you to these people? How do you feel when you are there with them?
- Imagine yourself at a wedding where you see the radiant smiles of the bride and groom when they see each other as she walks down the aisle. Are you smiling too?
- Sorry – for this one- imagine the smells of your mom or dad’s cooking or your grandmom/safta/bubbie’s kitchen? Or maybe how you feel when you walk into Ben’s or Kolbeh and smell the smells of your childhood...
- Imagine yourself at the top of a mountain or in the middle of a large field – where the world and your life seem limitless? Do you feel closer to God here?
- Imagine yourself in the middle of a desert where no one can hear you? What do you hear? What would you yell? What would you want to share from your heart?

Now think of these images together – people, places, smiles, smells, sounds? And think of Shabbat.// We all approach Shabbat in different ways and have so many different ideas of what Shabbat is or could be. Some of us have had minimal contact with Shabbat. Today, I want us to meet Shabbat.// What does Shabbat mean to us? What could it mean in our lives?

Correct me if I am wrong, but I think a lot of us, when we think of Shabbat, we think of it as a day of no’s. You cant do this and you cant do that – no writing, no cell phones, no driving, no work, no fun. Or we think of it as a day of only prayer – lots and lots of prayer. Or maybe we think of it a little like the Christian Sabbath that we see depicted on TV, some decorous prayer, maybe a family meal. But Shabbat can be something completely different – what could it mean to you?

I want to share the story of a woman who faced this very question. She wrote about this experience years ago and I am sorry I forgot to write down her name to share it with you today. She and her husband had divorced several years earlier. She had two sons. She was in law school as a second career student post-divorce, and was now in her summer internship. She worked so hard that first week, she never saw her sons when they were awake. Not for breakfast and not for dinner when they came home from camp. She saw them when they were asleep in their beds.// The end of the week was coming, she was wiped, but most of all she was missing her boys. She asked for time off Friday night so she could spend some time with them and she was told that was not possible.// But then she was talking with a co-worker – who by the way was happy – she learned that he was going home early on Friday. How was that possible she asked him? She asked to be off and was told no. He said he was Shabbat observant and they had to let him off to observe Shabbat. Then, since the office had the policy that if you were off Saturday, you were off Sunday for the packet, you had the entire weekend off.// Now this woman had never lied before, but a weekend with her children and some time to rest sounded amazing. She stood up straight marched herself into HR and announced that she was Shabbat observant. She was not only given that Friday night, Saturday, and Sunday off – she got every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday off. She found herself on the subway going home on Friday, exhausted – but wondering – what did it mean to be Shabbat observant? She didn't want to tell a falsehood? So -she had little time to figure out what Shabbat observance meant to her- on that New York city subway ride before there was wifi underground.// When she got above ground she went to the supermarket, got supplies for a nice dinner (sorry with the food again) and told her boys they could not go out that night. She made dinner, she lit two votive candles she found in her house – and she observed Shabbat in a way that worked for her. It became a time she and her boys looked forward to every week. Whatever job she took after that she told them that she was Shabbat observant so she could keep her custom of these special nights.// After the boys went to college she wondered – should I stop this? The thought of sitting alone didn't seem right. So every week she began inviting friends over and going over to their houses – and the joy and the holiness of Shabbat continued to be a

gift to her and those whom she cared about.// In the beginning, Shabbat was what preserved her and her family during a trying time, but soon it became something incredibly meaningful in her life? So what could Shabbat mean to you? If you suddenly *had to* “observe Shabbat” what would it look like? How would it feel?

If you have never thought about Shabbat it may feel foreign, but lets put it in the framework of a ritual you may do more often. How many of us attend sporting events? Football? What do you wear for the game? Before we put on our jersey and hat for our team? We go – and we tailgate or have a special buffet? – a special meal (sorry food *again*). When the game starts, we stand for the anthem, a special song. We then have special chants and cheers for our team. Give me a T – E – A – M (Giants? Mets?)

Maybe sports aren’t your thing – what if it is going out with friends- you get dressed up in special clothes – special cuisine – perhaps listen to some music – I have seen those facebook pics – I know you enjoy it!

Shabbat can be like that – a time to put on something different, to eat something meaningful, to say or sing things or listen to music that connects us to something greater, to God & to a tradition going back how many thousands of years. What could Shabbat mean to you?

Or Shabbat could be a hike when the weather is nice in a field. There is a story of a little girl on Friday night, instead of walking to shul, she walked into a big field – the rabbi asked her why she was going to a field and not to shul – isn’t god everywhere he asked – and the girl replied – God may be the same everywhere – but I am not – as in she felt differently – she felt closer to God in the middle of that field – so *where* could Shabbat mean something to you?

In our tradition, Shabbat is sacred time – God worked really hard putting the world together – like so many of you who work so hard every day keeping things together and moving – and on the seventh God rested, or better, God created rest on the 7<sup>th</sup> day. In our Torah we are asked to Shamor to Guard and to Zachor to Remember Shabbat. And for sure there are many of us who

simply cannot stop working on Friday nights and Saturdays, but there still can be a meaningful Shabbat experience.

The two versions of the 10 Commandments each use a different word for observing Shabbat, the first says “Zachor et Yom ha’Shabat”, Remember Shabbat, and the second says, “Shamor et Yom Ha Shabat,” guard the Shabbat day. Rabbi Chayim ben Moshe Attar, the Or Ha’Chayim, teaches us about how we make sense of these two mitzvot, why the two different words? His response can help us frame our Shabbat by focusing first on how we welcome Shabbat in and how we say goodbye Saturday night – He explains that the first teaches us to make Shabbat holy as it comes in, and the second reminds us to make Shabbat holy as it leaves us.

What could Shabbat mean to you?

The great Jewish philosopher Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel puts the magic of the Shabbat experience into language that we can relate to, the why of why we have a Shabbat in the first place. He explains, “There is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord...” Shabbat opens the possibility of thinking outside of ourselves, of our relationship to the world – and so it is natural our tradition sees Friday evening as a time to devote to giving tzedakah. That is one way many families celebrate Shabbat as it begins.

There are many families I have known, and in this community, who make Shabbat special with a rule that kids have to be at home Friday night for Shabbat dinner, and they can choose to go out afterwards or stay home, but the rule stays firm, and many found that other kids wanted to come and join for the Shabbat experience.

Rabbi Edward Feld, a teacher of mine, and once a congregational rabbi, wrote about hosting Shabbat meals that would start near or after sunset, by necessity, because guests from the community could not arrive sooner from work. Not a problem during the long summer days, but when the clocks change, they would only be able to come home after dark. At these meals, candles would be lit even though it was already nightfall. As a way of helping others to add holiness to their lives, to increase in holiness, ma’alin bakodesh, we can begin to create Shabbat in ways that fit in with the lives we already lead.

If we focus in on lighting candles, we can see how the ritual itself can be meaningful even if we are at a point when we cannot perform it by the teaching of tradition. Rabbi Scott Perlo, a colleague in Washington, DC, explains how he was studying at a yeshivah in Jerusalem, high level learning, and he was riding high on being an advanced student amongst beginners in the school. At a school wide session with the rosh yeshivah, head of school, a first-year student asked, “Rebbe, why do we light Shabbat candles?” In that moment, he realized he knew everything about how to light the candles, what materials to use, how many candles, exactly when candle-lighting happens. But he was struck by how he could not communicate *why* we light candles, and the Rosh Yeshivah simply said, “We light Shabbat candles so that we can have a beautiful Shabbat.” Light brings joy, candles bring beauty into the home, something real, a sense of spirit and life. This is the magic of the moments when Shabbat begins and we can begin to step back for a moment, mentally for sure, and hopefully physically as well, to marvel at the fact that *we exist*, that the world exists and functions, that time itself is special and sacred.

An amazing and relevant example of this from current events in Israel emphasizes that Shabbat can happen anywhere, whether we’re at home, or away, *uv’shochbecha be’veytecha, uv’lechtech vadera* – an important reminder in our hectic lives, constantly in motion.

They are building a new railroad line between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, a line that will run much faster than the traditional scenic route that leaves Jerusalem from nearby the Malka Shopping Mall. Ultra-Orthodox parties protested last month that the work on this line was continuing over Shabbat.

Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo, a visionary Orthodox Rabbi in Israel, writes that ‘there is only one sanctity that is even greater than Shabbat and that is the holiness of the human being. When we have to choose between these two...Jewish law is clear: The human being takes precedence.’ So if it is true that the Tel Aviv light rail and the speed train will save countless lives by having people use public transit rather than drive, then Rabbi Cardozo believes there’s

more than sufficient support to demand that in fact the work *should continue on Shabbat* to complete the project as soon as possible.

But he knows, as we do, how important Shabbat is to us as Jews, how any real Judaism must recognize in some way that Shabbat is a special day, a different day, and so he makes the following suggestions. Israelis should organize areas around the construction site where regular Israelis, not the workers, can create Shabbat community around the work area, make Kiddush, serve Shabbat meals. There can then be rotating minyanim so that workers can recite prayers, hear the Torah reading, in shifts, so that work can continue. They can sing Shabbat songs, hear a good dvar Torah that informs everyone of the wonderful mitzvah the workers are doing, working on Shabbat to save lives.

Rabbi Cardozo acknowledges many readers will consider his ideas 'insane' but he says, "Let's not forget what philosopher and writer George Santayana once said: Sanity is madness put to good use."

Heschel gives us a way of thinking about Shabbat as compared to other days, but here in shul – the main focus, at least at this time because Shabbat can be more than prayer, the main focus are the services we have on Friday nights and Saturday mornings.

What does going to shul do for us on Shabbat? I know we can improve our Shabbat experience here at the wjc. We do a lot right on Shabbat and have a wonderful and warm Shabbat crew. But I know we could make things more meaningful for you and those you care about. *What could we do better on Shabbat? I have lots of great feedback and leads for that wonderful couple on an adoption journey we prayed for on Rosh Hashanah – can you give me Shabbat feedback so we can continue to build this holy community and more importantly – help you spiritually on this journey.*

I am not asking for me, I am not asking for the congregation, I am asking for you. I want you to have this meaningful time in your life – I want you to give this to yourself as a gift. We force ourselves to the gym to take care of our bodies. How do we care for our souls? No one can see them, so sometimes they can be a little neglected. We have an annual physical, but God gives

us the chance for Shabbat a weekly 'spiritual'. The more we work on our neshamot, on our souls, the more we feel them and are guided and nourished by them, the more that if we do focus on the health of our souls this year – the next Shabbat, and God willing next year's Yom Kippur, could be even more transformative for us.

I know we ask for a lot on the holidays. Many of you have missed work to be here today. People asked for money. You were implored to both give and *forgive*. But I want to ask you three more things: This Friday night, light two candles, say a blessing, bless your friends and family, in person, by phone or Skype, bless and ask – what could Shabbat mean for me?

I want to offer one additional vision of what Shabbat could mean for us, especially for our children at a time in history when anti-Semitism is resurgent, often along with or hidden inside anti-Israel rhetoric on college campuses, at the UN, through the work of the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement and other non-governmental organizations who target Israel.

How many in this room sent one or more of your children off to college for their freshman year? How many have children in college beyond the first year?

Our students on campuses here and across the country confront powerful public demonstrations from BDS groups, students for justice in Palestine, and often from professors on campus who advise these groups. My own alma mater, Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, to my great surprise, was recently identified as the campus with the 4<sup>th</sup> greatest amount of anti-Israel activity in the country, where there are now die-ins, harassment at Israel events, and statements supporting harassment of visiting pro-Israel speakers – and tragically, the same is happening on many more campuses.

Shabbat is one ingredient in the life of our people that can give us an anchor in our identity, strength in fellowship and numbers, and a way to celebrate our Judaism that is shared by Jews

the world over. Whether religious or secular, we gathered at Tufts Hillel during my student days to say the blessings, eat a good meal, but more than that, we gathered to feel closer and connected to each other, our tradition and God.

If we can begin at home to plant the seeds of Shabbat as a moment to build our resources of inner strength and identity. If we can begin to plant the seeds of Shabbat as a time that reminds us always of our deep connections to our brothers and sisters in Israel and our support for them, of our support for justice too – after all, Jewish tradition teaches that we must provide so that everyone, everyone without exception, can have food for Shabbat – then we stand a much better chance at pushing back against those who rail against Israel and Jews.

It is no wonder, then, that Ahad Ha'Am, a great teacher of the Jewish people in the days before the State of Israel came into being, that he said, “More than the Jewish people have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jewish people.” Shabbat keeps us who we are, the one island in time that is unlike any other Sabbath practice, that gives us a weekly gift of time – time that flies so quickly away, the years for us feeling shorter and shorter as we get older even as some days may feel interminably long.

May this Yom Kippur, itself a Shabbat, give us roots, and strength, and the inspiration to begin a Shabbat journey this year that reminds us regularly how holy the 7<sup>th</sup> day is, and in the bigger picture, how holy, irreplaceable, and special is each moment.

G'mar ketivah ve'chatimah tovah – May we all be written and sealed in the Book of Life.

Amen.