

OPENING REFLECTION

What is the key to unity? To live in a relationship.

As social beings, we try to live authentic connections with one another; we move beyond a world of transactional relationships and celebrate our lives together in a spirit of love and support. But as spiritual beings, we also seek to cultivate a deeper relationship with our sense of the Eternal, the Holy One. Finally, we seek the innermost voice of our souls, our *neshama*.

Shabbat is the opportunity to build chords of connections on all levels. We connect with family and friends, and welcome new guests into our homes. We disconnect from the distractions of phones and social media, and focus our attention on those sitting around our Shabbat table. Through silence, song, Torah study, and prayer we create pathways to access the deepest and most elevated natures of our souls and can even experience sparks of the Infinite in our chaotic world.

On Shabbat we are told that we are given a *Neshama Yeteira*, an elevated soul. Those souls shine, and if we live our lives in light of this soul throughout our lives, we bring light and healing to all the corners of darkness right now. Our tradition calls shabbat *me'en olam haba*, a taste of the world to come, a world of harmony and peace. Those who celebrate Shabbat with intentionality, with *kavannah*, can attest to the special gift of Shabbat.

Our tradition provides pathways to access these sacred ideals: ritual, study, connection, and blessing.

Our shabbat tonight is an opportunity:

Give Love to one another unconditionally.

Become a source of Light to one another.

Celebrate together with moments of Joy,

Commit to Live Lives of Holiness

Connect to our Fellow Jews in Distress



CANDLE LIGHTING REFLECTION

LIGHT AND RESILIENCE

On Shabbat we open by lighting candles. The technical reason for this is *oneg* shabbat, the pleasantness of Shabbat, and one cannot enjoy a festive meal in a dark room. (Of course, there were no electric lights in the ancient world.) However, on a deeper level, to light candles is to bring light into the dark places of our lives. We open Shabbat with the conviction that despite the forces of darkness that surround our lives at times, on Shabbat we give ourselves the permission to bask under the spiritual light of the Divine. We refuse to succumb to despair.

In addition, the physical lights allow us to see the faces of those around us, and to realize we are not alone. Hence, we are surrounded by both spiritual light and the light of those around us.

We should carry this light of Shabbat within us every day. Like candles, we too can be sources of light.

Ashkenazi Jews first light and then bless, while Sephardi Jews bless and then light:

ברוך אתה ה' אל-הינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצונו להדליק נר של שבת

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav vitzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat.

Blessed are You, God, Ruler of the universe, who sanctified us with the commandment of lighting Shabbat candles.

Traditionally, candle lighting is done at the time when the Shabbat begins.

SHALOM ALEICHEM WELCOMING ANGELS OF PEACE INTO OUR HOMES

It is a universal custom to open up our Shabbat meal with the welcoming of angels of *Shalom*, of peace. However, we not only ask them to bless us with peace (the third stanza), we also greet them and send them away with blessings of peace. In this way, we mirror the heavenly angels above, blessing them with peace.

There are times in history in which the world above and the world below seem unbridgeable. The idyllic world of the angels can indeed seem beyond reach. In the divided, conflicted world in which we live, 'there is a time for war and a time for peace' (Ecclesiastes 3:8). Yet, we know that ultimately we and the world cannot flourish without peace, and Shabbat is a taste of that higher reality. As shabbat opens, we pray that all of us ultimately experience the wholeness and serenity that is *shalom* in our unredeemed world.

*Shalom Aleichem malachei hashareit,
malachei elyon,
mimelech malchei ham'lachim,
HaKadosh Baruch Hu.*

*Bo-achem l'shalom, malachei hashalom
malachei elyon,
mimelech malchei ham'lachim
HaKadosh Baruch Hu.*

*Bar'chuni l'shalom, malachei hashalom,
malachei elyon,
mimelech malchei ham'lachim
HaKadosh Baruch Hu.*

*Tzeit'chem l'shalom, malachei hashalom,
malachei elyon,
mimelech malchei ham'lachim
HaKadosh Baruch Hu*

שְׁלוֹם עֲלֵיכֶם מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרָת
מַלְאָכֵי עֲלִיּוֹן
מִמְלַךְ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים
הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא

בּוֹאֲכֶם לְשָׁלוֹם מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם
מַלְאָכֵי עֲלִיּוֹן
מִמְלַךְ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים
הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא

בְּרַכּוּנִי לְשָׁלוֹם מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם
מַלְאָכֵי עֲלִיּוֹן
מִמְלַךְ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים
הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא

צֵאתְכֶם לְשָׁלוֹם מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם
מַלְאָכֵי עֲלִיּוֹן
מִמְלַךְ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים
הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא

Peace be upon you, O angels who serve God, angels of the Most High—from the Ruler who is above all other Rulers, the Holy One, Blessed is God.

Come in peace, O angels of peace, angels of the Most High—from the Ruler who is above all other Rulers, the Holy One, Blessed is God.

Bless me with peace, O angels of peace, angels of the Most High—from the Ruler who is above all other Rulers, the Holy One, Blessed is God.

Depart in peace, O angels of peace, angels of the Most High—from the Ruler who is above all other Rulers, the Holy One, Blessed is God.

BLESSING OUR CHILDREN GIVE LOVE UNCONDITIONALLY

On Friday night it is customary to bless children if we are fortunate to have them. The blessing for boys comes from the blessing that Jacob gave his grandchildren, Ephraim and Menashe. Why these two children? One explanation is that unlike other previous generations filled with filial strife and competition, Ephraim and Menashe lived in harmony, and the unconditional love for one another overcame any differences they might have had.

יְשִׁימָךְ אֱלֹהֵי-הַיָּם כְּאַפְרַיִם וְכִמְנַשֶּׁה
Yesimcha Elohim K-Ephraim U-Kemanashe
May God Make you like Ephraim and Menashe

For Girls, we bless them to be like the matriarchs. They were models of dedication and perseverance, models of leadership for the Jewish people.

יְשִׁימֶךְ אֱלֹהֵי-הַיָּם כְּשָׂרָה רִבְקָה רָחֵל וְלֵאָה
Yesimech Elohim k'Sarah Rivka Rachel v'Leah
May you be like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah.

Following this we bless everyone with the traditional priestly blessing:

יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' וַיְשַׁמְרֶךָ
יָאֵר ה' פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי וַיְחַנֶּנֶךָ
יִשָּׂא ה' פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם
Yivarechecha Adonai v'yishmerecha
Ya'er Adonai panav eilecha vichuneka
Yisa Adonai panav eilecha v'yasem lecha shalom

May God bless you and protect you.
May God show you favor and be gracious to you.
May God show you kindness and grant you peace.

Perhaps before shabbat begins, call a fellow Jew in Israel and tell them you are thinking of them and their families, and share this blessing. We can bless our extended family.

KIDDUSH REFLECTION ELEVATION OF LIFE

In the Talmud, the rabbis contend that sanctifying Shabbat with a beautiful table is a sign of blessing for the whole week. Sanctifying the Shabbat over wine, a sign of joy, is a way to elevate time. How does preparing for Shabbat each week elevate our lives?

It was taught in a rabbinic teaching: Rabbi Yosei bar Yehuda says: Two ministering angels accompany a person on Shabbat evening from the synagogue to his home, one good angel and one evil angel. And when the person returns home and finds a lamp burning and a table set and a bed made, the good angel says: May it be Your will that it shall be like this for another Shabbat. And the evil angel answers against his will: Amen. (Shabbat 119a)

While too much joy during certain difficult periods may be inappropriate, song and joy is also an expression of faith, living in the expectation of hope for a better tomorrow. This hope has always been the key to Jewish survival. There are times in our lives in which we need to focus on 'filling our cups' to the best of our ability. We do this for ourselves and our families, but also for those hostages for whom we pray they safely return.

Pour a glass of wine and recite the following blessing, sanctifying the Shabbat.

יְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר
יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי. וְיִכְלוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל צְבָאָם
וְיִכְלוּ אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלֹאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה. וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל מְלֹאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה
וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ. כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מְכָל מְלֹאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְרִי הַגֶּפֶן
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְרָצָה בְּנוֹ. וְשָׁבַת קִדְּשׁוּ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הַנְּחִילָנוּ זְכוּרֹן לְמַעֲשֵׂה
בְּרָאשִׁית. כִּי הוּא יוֹם תְּחִלָּה לְמַקְרָאֵי קִדְּשׁ זְכוּר לְיִצְיָאֵת מִצְרַיִם. כִּי בְנוּ בְּחַרְתָּ וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדְּשָׁתָּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים וְשָׁבַת קִדְּשָׁתָּ
בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הַנְּחִילָתָנוּ
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' מְקַדֵּשׁ הַשְּׁבֹת

Va-y'hee erev, va-y'hee boker Yom ha-shishi.

Vay'chulu hashamayim v'ha-aretz v'chol tz'va'am. Vay'chal Elohim bayom hash'vi'i milachto asher asa. Vayishbot bayom hash'vi'i mikol milachto asher asa. Vay'varech Elohim et yom hash'vi'i vay'kadesh oto. Kee vo shabbat mi-kol m'lachto asher bara Elohim la'asot.

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei p'ri hagafen.

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'ratza vanu, v'shabbat kod'sho b'ahava uv'ratzon hinchilanu, zikaron l'ma'aseh b'reishit. Ki hu yom t'chila l'mikra-ay kodesh, zaycher l'tziat mitzrayim. Ki vanu vacharta v'otanu kidashta mikol ha'amim. V'shabbat kod-shi-cha b'ahava uv'ratzon hinchal tanu.

Baruch ata Adonai, mi'kadesh ha Shabbat.

There was an evening and there was a morning on the sixth day.

And the Heavens and the Earth and all they contained were completed, and on the seventh day God desisted from all the work that he had done. And God rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, for on that day he rested from all the work which he had done in creating the world.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, how has sanctified us with his commandments and favored us and given us in love and favor his holy Shabbat as an inheritance, as a remembrance of the act of creation. For this day is the beginning of all holy days, a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt. For you have chosen us and you have blessed us from among all the nations. And you have bequeathed us your holy Shabbat in love and favor. Blessed are you, Lord, who sanctifies Shabbat.

Drink the wine and savor its taste.

RITUAL WASHING BECOMING LIKE PRIESTS

Originally our priestly ancestors were required to wash their hands and feet when they entered the Holy Temple to perform their sacrificial duties. When the Second Temple was destroyed, the rabbis were concerned that the ritual would be forgotten. Thus, they moved the ritual from the Holy Temple to the dining room.

Similarly, when we make the blessing on the bread, we dip it into salt, for salt accompanied every sacrifice. The rabbis teach that the shabbat table with words of Torah are like the sacrificial altar.

The rituals of the Temple were meant to remind us that we are in fact holy creatures, in relationship with the Divine. In the world we live in, the notions of holiness can seem strange for many,, but Shabbat reminds us that we can live holy lives.

How does the ritual of handwashing connect us to our past, and give us hope for the future?

A cup of water is filled and poured twice on the right hand and twice on the left. Following this the blessing is recited:

ברוך אתה ה' אל-הינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על נטילת ידים

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav vitzivanu al n'tilat yadayim.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments, and command us concerning the washing of the hands.

HAMOTZI

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GIFTS AND SHARING WITH OTHERS

From Marcia Falk's Commentary on her work, *The Book of Blessings*:

The twentieth-century German Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig writes: "The sweet, fully ripened fruit of humanity craves community . . . in the very act of renewing the life of the body." If, as Rosenzweig has it, the meal is the foundation of community, bread is often the foundation of the meal. In ancient times, bread itself was considered a meal, and bread was the way people engaged in fellowship. Thus, bread was symbolic of both physical and social sustenance. The rabbis, too, saw bread as a double symbol—of God's gift of sustenance to humanity and of humanity's sacrificial offerings to God. For the rabbis, the table was an altar and the meal at which bread was served was a reenactment of the devotional rituals of Temple times.

A shabbat meal is as it were, not only a meal between Jews, but a meal with God at the table! We welcome the Divine presence into our midst.

We take two *challot* to remember the miraculous bread of the wilderness, the *manna*. Every day the people received a portion, but on Friday they received a double portion. Thus, the two *challot* are to represent God's daily gifts to us, and our blessing upon them is an act of gratitude, recognizing what we have in our lives. Those who are grateful and feel wealthy also have the capacity of sharing. Following the blessing on a whole challah we cut or rip it apart and distribute it to one another in an act of fellowship.

However, this year we are acutely aware that there are so many unable to sit and partake of a shabbat meal. Our hearts are directed to those hostages, waiting to return to their families. We set an open place at our shabbat table and leave a piece of challah on the plate and direct our hearts not to just who is around us, but those that are missing.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who has brought forth bread from the earth.

TORAH OF UNITY

Elevate your shabbat with conversations of meaning. Here are a few texts and questions to get you started.

Megillat Esther 5:12-17

When Mordecai was told what Esther had said, Mordecai had this message delivered to Esther: "Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the King's palace. On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father's house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis." Then Esther sent back this answer to Mordecai: "Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast on my behalf; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the Ruler, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish!" So, Mordecai went about [the city] and did just as Esther had commanded him.

- Initially when Esther is told about the plot to destroy the Jews, she refuses to approach the King, as she herself is afraid. What does Mordechai's response teach us about Jewish responsibility for one another?
- Why does Esther ask people to fast? What meaning does that have for what she is about to do? When our brothers and sisters are in danger's way, what is our appropriate response?

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (Parashat VaYakhel, 5775)

What Moses had to do after the Golden Calf was Vayakhel – turn the Israelites into a kehillah, a community. He did this in the obvious sense of restoring order. When Moses came down the mountain and saw the Calf, the Torah says the people were pru'ah, meaning "wild," "disorderly," "chaotic," "unruly," "tumultuous." He "saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies" (Ex. 32:25). They were not a community but a crowd. He did it in a more fundamental sense as we see in the rest of the parsha. He began by reminding the people of the laws of Shabbat. Then he instructed them to build the Mishkan, the Sanctuary, as a symbolic home for God.

Why these two commands rather than any others? Because Shabbat and the Mishkan are the two most powerful ways of building community. The best way of turning a diverse, disconnected group into a team is to get them to build something together. Hence the Mishkan. The best way of strengthening relationships is to set aside dedicated time when we focus not on the pursuit of individual self-interest but on the things we share, by praying together, studying Torah together, and celebrating together – in other words, Shabbat. Shabbat and the Mishkan were the two great community-building experiences of the Israelites in the desert.

More than this: in Judaism, community is essential to the spiritual life. Our holiest prayers require a minyan (ten people). When we celebrate or mourn, we do so as a community. Even when we confess, we do so together. Maimonides rules:

One who separates himself from the community, even if he does not commit a transgression but merely holds himself aloof from the congregation of Israel, does not fulfill the commandments together with his people, shows himself indifferent to their distress and does not observe their fast days but goes on his own way like one of the nations who does not belong to the Jewish people – such a person has no share in the world to come. (Hilkhos Teshuvah 3:11)

- Our weekly *parashah* speaks of a joint project for the Jewish people that consumes all of their resources- financial, physical, intellectual, and spiritual. What Jewish mission today should consume all our efforts and why?

Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Sabbath

He who wants to enter the holiness of the day must first lay down the profanity of clattering commerce, of being yoked to toil. He must go away from the screech of dissonant days, from the nervousness and fury of acquisitiveness and the betrayal in embezzling his own life. He must say farewell to manual work and learn to understand that the world has already been created and will survive without the help of man. Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to Someone Else. Six days a week we seek to dominate the world, on the seventh day we try to dominate the self.”

- When we step away from our work, for what do we make time?
- What does it mean to ‘dominate the self’?

Rabbi Shraga Simmon

Realize that all Jews must be united in order for the nation to be redeemed. The verse (Exodus 19:2) says that the Jewish people camped at Mount Sinai. Rashi points out that the word for "camped" is written in the singular, to indicate that they were "like one person with one heart." Say the commentators: Jewish unity is a prerequisite for acceptance of the Torah.

- How do we deal with those with whom we disagree? Does one heart mean to have one standard for all?
- Is there a difference between unity and uniformity?

Babylonian Talmud Taanit 11a

The rabbis analyze the actions of Moses during the battle against Amalek, the archenemy of the Jewish people, bent on their destruction. The Torah tells us that Moses watching the battle from atop the mountain became tired and needed to sit on a rock.

...A person should be distressed together with the community. As we found with Moses our teacher that he was distressed together with the community, as it is stated during the war with Amalek: "But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat upon it" (Exodus 17:12). But didn't Moses have one pillow or one cushion to sit upon; why was he forced to sit on a rock? Rather, Moses said as follows: Since the Jewish people are immersed in suffering, I too will be with them in suffering, as much as I am able, although I am not participating in the fighting. The rabbis adds: And anyone who is distressed together with the community will merit seeing the consolation of the community.

- Israel is engaged in a fight against an intractable enemy, Hamas. Most of us are not serving in the war, but how can we show support?
- We are approaching the holiday of Purim, where we celebrate the victory over Haman and those forces who wanted to destroy us. The parallels with events this year are unsettling, to say the least. What should our Purim look like this year? Should it be more subdued, or should we celebrate with even more joy?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AROUND THE TABLE

- When have you felt a sense of unity with fellow Jews? Share a story you have not shared.
- What have you been feeling during these days? Have you had conflicting feelings? (Remember, during times of uncertainty, there are no 'wrong feelings'.)
- How have recent domestic events regarding antisemitic incidents impacted you, if at all. Have recent events shaken your convictions in America? If so, what do you think can be done?
- In only a few weeks we will be celebrating Passover. In every generation, this story is told differently, reflecting not only our collective past in Egypt, but the challenges of the present. What ideas would you want to share this year at the seder?
- Have you considered going to Israel to volunteer, or get more involved in the Jewish community here? What one thing can you do right now to advance Jewish unity?



SHABBAT
SHALOM!