

# *Shabbat*

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*More than Israel has kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath  
has kept Israel.*

—AHAD HA'AM

Over the long and rich history of the Jewish people, the weekly observance of Shabbat has played a central role. The actual details of how Jews have observed Shabbat

As a cultural/spiritual Zionist, Ahad Ha'am wanted to shift the notion of what bound Jews to each other from an emphasis on nation state and territory to an emphasis on language and cultural practices. The Sabbath here is construed as a moral or spiritual Jewish practice, not necessarily as a religious one. Ahad Ha'am was concerned about saving Judaism, not Jews; hence, the emphasis on the Sabbath preserving Israel (Jews) rather than the reverse. Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, of course, felt that one had to save Jews so that they could save Judaism. Thus Kaplan's commitment to reconstructing Judaism.

—D.D.M.

have evolved over the centuries and varied according to where Jews have lived and which cultural traditions they have inherited. In all communities of which we are aware, however, Shabbat has been the primary axis upon which Jewish life has turned: preparing for Shabbat, lighting the candles before sunset on Friday, sanctifying the day over wine and hallah, eating, singing, praying and studying Torah. The day revolves around putting aside the cares of the week to create 25 hours devoted to holy, restful living until the moment on Saturday evening when the *Havdala* ceremony marks Shabbat's end. However the melodies, the foods and the customs have varied, Shabbat has sustained Jewish lives.

Many of us today find it challenging to receive this rich inheritance for a host of reasons—among them, because our lives are so busy; because the worlds in which we live do not stop on Friday evenings if they ever stop at all; because we were not raised in households where Shabbat was observed, and we are uncertain how to proceed;

The shift in our sense of mitzvah from obligation to opportunity implies the move that sociologist Peter Berger calls “a movement from fate to choice.” Perhaps it is true that the world in which we live does not stop on Friday night—all the more important, then, that we see Shabbat as a choice, as a way of taking back some of the control that our 24/7, online and perpetually connected culture deprives us of. —R.H.

I learned in my meditation practice that it is when I don't want to meditate that I most need to meditate. Similarly, when I am “too busy for Shabbat,” that's when I need Shabbat. —J.M.

because when we think of Shabbat observers, we think of the rigors of the practice of Orthodox Jews, and we do not find that appealing. This chapter introduces and explains a host of Shabbat practices and some of the underlying meanings associated with them so that readers may learn what they do not know or explore the significance of practices that may already be familiar. The chapter also celebrates the diversity of our backgrounds, spiritual interests and needs. Observing Shabbat offers joy and meaning to everyone who is interested, but the precise form of that celebration will necessarily differ since each of us is unique.

## ***Kavanot for Shabbat: Themes That Express How Shabbat Can Enrich Our Lives***

### *Revaluation*

The list of *kavanot* (themes) that follows is a sampling of the ways in which Jews have looked at Shabbat over the centuries. In some cases, these interpretations contradict each other, reflecting the vast diversity of experiences and viewpoints of Jews throughout our history. Shabbat is so central to Jewish experience through the ages that every

For many Jews, it is the sense of Shabbat restriction, what they are “not allowed to do” that is off-putting. For many nonhalakhic Jews, mitzvot (especially the “shalt nots”) feel like a direct threat to individualism and evoke a sense of being told what to do. So many Jews have had negative experiences of being exposed only to a Judaism defined by restriction and an external and judgmental authority without opportunities for spiritual nourishment, joyousness and cultivation of awareness. —M.M.

generation and every community has added its own interpretations, practices and understanding of Shabbat. This list of suggestions is designed as a tool to enrich the experience of Shabbat and as an impetus to generate new interpretations of the meaning of Shabbat.

Each of these *kavanot* is framed in traditional language and imagery. It is important to note at the outset that our employment of these mythic images does not necessarily suggest that we believe in them literally. They are presented here to illustrate how traditional biblical, midrashic and liturgical images can retain power for us even when we do *not* literally believe in them. You don't have to believe, for example, that God literally created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day in order to experience the transformative Sabbath rest that occurs when we leave our workweek behind at sunset on Fridays.

In *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan applied the term "reevaluation" to this method of interpreting rituals. We *consciously* look at the traditional poetic formulations of a ritual or prayer,

God is not something I believe in but rather something I experience in the everyday miracles of life. The power of Shabbat is not dependent upon belief in a supernatural being. That power lies in our opportunity, week after week, to create experiences that help add meaning and purpose to our lives. —S.C.R.

I love the idea of conscious reinterpretation. It is time to help people understand the great value of practice, indeed, Jewish transformational practice, without supernaturalism. That is why I, for one, am a follower of Mordecai Kaplan! —S.P.W.

Reevaluation is not always about defining underlying values and expressing those values in a new idiom. Sometimes it involves keeping the ritual form and finding new significance for it—different values that can inhabit that ritual. —M.M.

determine the values underlying it, and then express those values in a contemporary idiom. To those of us who believe, with Kaplan, that Judaism is the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people, it is clear that every generation of Jews has engaged in this process of reinterpretation. The difference is that prior generations did this largely *unconsciously*, believing that their new interpretations were what was originally intended.

In premodern societies that assumed the words of sacred text to be accurate records of revelations from God, innovation masquerades as interpretation. Otherwise, premodern interpreters would have experienced an intense cognitive dissonance between their fidelity to received tradition and their self-consciousness that they were changing that (presumably unchanging) tradition. But earlier generations do not speak with a single voice. Surely some interpreters labeled their innovations “original intent.” But others used legitimations derived from other vocabulary, including “hidden meanings” and “symbolic story.” —R.H.

One of the most exciting things about being a progressive Jew today is recognizing that the past is a gift given to us by our ancestors and that it is our privilege to embrace those rituals and ideas that continue to inspire us while at the same time adding our own ideas, rituals and new traditions to the ongoing evolution of Jewish civilization. —S.C.R.

One potential benefit, then, of revaluation (conscious reinterpretation) is that we remain connected to the sacred milieu of our ancestors, thereby allowing ourselves to be acculturated into and influenced by their values and perspectives—that is, we acknowledge that we do not know everything and that we have much to learn from the treasures of our traditions. In this way, we avoid distancing ourselves unnecessarily from the sacred experiences of prior generations.

The danger to revaluation is in simplifying the process so that it becomes reinterpretation to suit your own needs. This “anything goes” attitude is not the goal of revaluation; rather, we strive to engage deeply with the values that have motivated a ritual practice and to find ways to express those values in ways that are resonant with tradition, but contemporary in execution.

—N.H.M.

Revaluation presumes that we want to stay connected somehow to our ancestors, that there is something of benefit to that connection spanning centuries, that our worldview and our values can and even should reflect more than our current moment. Yet revaluation also shatters a conservatism that insists that our ancestors’ values are the only ones worth preserving. Revaluation creates space for the assertion that the best of our values and perspectives are worth entering into the chain of Jewish continuity.

—D.W.

You can believe in God with your right brain and not believe in God with your left brain.

—S.P.W.

Both the practices and words of our ancestors are worth preserving in our Jewish repertoire. While I don’t say prayer words I find ethically or theologically offensive, I continue to say many words that I don’t find particularly inspiring because of the countless times one of those previously uninspiring words has suddenly opened up deep meanings to me. New life circumstances or new understanding or just a new mood opens up these previously unrecognized gems.

—J.A.S.

## *A Reminder of Creation* (Zekher L'ma'asey B'reyshit)

We usher in Shabbat on Friday evenings with candles, and we sanctify it with the Kiddush, a prayer that declares the day to be holy and recalls the story of the creation of the world as it is told in the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis. In that narrative, the Torah's writers imagined that God created the world in six days and then rested on the seventh. Traditionally, the celebration of Shabbat

Shabbat as rest was inferred from the prohibition against Shabbat work. The mitzvah of Shabbat is not to engage in activities that *halakha* labels as *m'lakha*—according to tradition, a series of 39 actions derived from the tasks needed to construct the portable sanctuary of the Exodus period. *M'lakha* thus does not easily translate as “work” in the sense of “effort.” At the end of the story of Creation, the Torah says that God “ceased and drew a breath” (*shavat vayinafash*). Shabbat in our day may be more significant as a time for actively setting aside work and instead doing things that make the day special in ways we cannot on the other six days. Shabbat then becomes a day for catching our breath (literally as well as figuratively) rather than simply a day of rest. —R.H.

Each of us is a creature of Creation. It is a gift to be part of a world that we can use to our benefit during the week. On Shabbat, we open ourselves to the experience of not being creators (as we are during the workweek) but being creaturely, aware that we did not create our world or ourselves. We refrain from changing our environments but allow them to make an impression on us, to taste the wonder and awe of the natural world and of our own fragile, wondrous beings. —M.M.

A midrash suggests that the act of resting on the seventh day was not a cessation from creation but rather its culmination and completion. This teaches that our generative acts, like God's, are made whole through rest, not through further work. —D.W.

“*L'kha Dodi*” is a 16th-century poem by Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz used nearly universally in the Friday night Jewish liturgy. In “*L'kha Dodi*,” Shabbat is described as “*sof ma'aseh b'mahashava i'hila*”—the last thing made when the world was created, but the first in mind. Lest we believe that the world was created for the sake of humanity, the poet reminds us that there was a seventh day of creation; the world was created for the sake of Shabbat. —J.G.K.

reminds us that there is a Creator of the world to whom we owe our lives and to whom we are responsible. Just as God rested on the seventh day, so should we rest in imitation of God.

Resting on Shabbat can thus be an important reminder

The traditional idea of imitating God can still inspire us to strive to incorporate our own highest ideals and values into our lives (to be more compassionate, more just, more loving, more caring, more patient, more kind) without having to believe in any particular theological image of God. —S.C.R.

It is an oft-repeated trope that we rest on the seventh day because God rested on the seventh day. But few pause to ask: Is God still resting? If not, does God continue to work and rest every seventh day? Implicit in the fact that these questions have no answer is an acknowledgment that Shabbat is ultimately a human creation, based on our meaningful cycles of work. The month and the year are respectively based on lunar and solar cycles. Not so the week, which is an arbitrary length of time. We rest every seventh day because we find it meaningful and necessary to do so. —J.M.S.

Just as Shabbat reminds us of Creation, and Shabbat practices encourage us not to create anything new, so we should be mindful not to destroy Creation on Shabbat. Shabbat can be a time to be with the created world just as it is. —B.P.

To my knowledge, the first chapters of the Book of Genesis contain the only ancient Creation myth that incorporates the notion that the Creator rested. This is a remarkable assertion! With the claim that God ended the creation process with Shabbat, the biblical authors imply that when we observe Shabbat, we are acting in accord with the fundamental structure of the universe. The idea of Shabbat rest, then, is clearly much more than mere rest and relaxation. To take a day each week when we honor Creation by ceasing from all creative (and destructive) acts helps attune us to the rhythms of Creation and the godliness that infuses it. —T.S.

Control is a primary spiritual issue, especially in our time. We delude ourselves into thinking we have more control than we have, and sometimes we even abandon the areas where we do have control, such as our practice and our priorities. If Shabbat were nothing more than a way to contemplate issues of control and self-understanding, it would still have infinite value. —S.P.W.



that we are not in control of our lives. Our time is not our own; we cannot determine the length of our lives. The work to which we are dedicated and the money that we are intent on earning are not ultimate values. No matter how urgent the work in which we are engaged on Friday afternoon seems to us, the weekly lesson is that it can wait.

Our time is not our own; neither is our world. In our six days of labor, we never fully finish the world—our work is endless. The traditional 39 categories of forbidden labor on Shabbat may be taken to hint at the limits of our mastery over the world. —J.A.S.

We imitate the divine. We come to know ourselves as creators, in the divine image, sharing that generative capacity with the source of all life. In connecting with the image that God rested on the seventh day, we experience rest as an essential part of the creative energy of the universe. Music has notes and silences. Creating needs periodic pauses for appreciating, gaining perspective, and experiencing humility and delight, and for imbuing our work with significance that connects small creations with a larger whole, that connects our creations to ultimate meaning (*kedusha*) and our deepest values. —M.M.

Indeed, our work should wait. Our priorities should dictate that ceasing from work on Shabbat is more important than engaging in work. —D.D.M.

By resting on Shabbat, I am also conscious that I am participating, in my own small way, in the healing of our planet by refraining from the consumption of some materials and energy that I would consume during a regular weekday. —N.C.M.

Religious practice connects us to ideas and values; it orients us. The religious experience our practice supports is embodied and internal, not primarily or initially cerebral, but our ideas and values shape our experience even as our religious experience reinforces our ideas and values. The weekly lesson is not only that the other work can wait but that other experiences and ways of being in the world are deeply valuable and are an important counterbalance to productivity. The nurturing experience of being comes into balance with doing. We connect with our essence as valuable not for what we achieve but simply for being amazingly alive. This balance enables us to cultivate ourselves as whole beings, richer beings, in abiding relationship with that which is larger than our individual beings and goals. —M.M.

Another mitzvah (commandment) that the Torah describes as a “Sabbath” is the commandment to observe the sabbatical year. In ancient Israel, land was to be cultivated for six years, but it was to lie fallow in the seventh year, called *sh’mita*. The seventh year is a Shabbat of God. We are to rest the land because it is not ours to exploit; it belongs to God. We use it on loan.

The weekly Shabbat works the same way. When we leave our busy lives behind for a day each week, it is not because we are incapable of continuing 24/7. To the contrary, we are supremely able to pursue our work without taking a break, and we often feel impelled to do so. We forget that whatever work we are pursuing, it ought to be God’s work. Shabbat reminds us of this.

The biblical sabbatical concept underlies the premise of contemporary sabbaticals—time off for those of us who are lucky enough to work in fields (pun intended) that recognize the need to recoup our energy and insight by letting go of regular activities.  
—D.D.M.

Perhaps the original idea of *sh’mita* can remind us today to have reverence for the earth and to exercise our responsibilities to replenish and nurture our natural resources as a sacred act.  
—S.C.R.

There is a tension in our tradition between the responsibility that comes with ownership and the concept that nothing really belongs to us. Instead of reading, “This book belongs to...” Hebrew bookplates often read, “*Ladonay ha’aretz um’lo’a*”—“The earth is God’s and all it contains.” (Psalms 24:1) Once, I was sitting on an Israeli train typing on my laptop when an ultra-Orthodox child accompanied by his father pointed to the computer and asked me, “*Zeh shel’kha?*” “Is this yours?” I answered him in Hebrew with the line from Psalms, and said that aside from that, I supposed it was.  
—J.G.K.

Shabbat is like many of the spiritual practices of cultures (tea ceremonies, flower arranging, meditation retreats): The purpose of the focused activity is to enable us to bring that level of attention and mindfulness to the entirety of life.  
—R.H.

*A Reminder of the Exodus from Egypt*  
(Zekher Litzit'at Mitzrayim)

The Friday evening Kiddush (blessing over the wine) also indicates that Shabbat serves as a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt. In this central Jewish story, narrated most explicitly at the Passover Seder, we are each required to regard ourselves as if we personally were slaves liberated from Egypt. The Exodus narrative is not a historical account that reports events that happened long ago. Rather, it is a story in which we participate in our lived, felt experience. Individually and collectively, we are all restricted by our fears and passions, our family upbringing, our cultural context and society's economic and political constraints, as well as in many other ways. And just as God delivered Israel out of Egyptian bondage, so do we locate in God the power of liberation from personal limitations and political oppression in our own lives.

This theme resounds through the daily liturgy, morning and evening. Shabbat, however, is an extremely potent weekly opportunity to enact and experience our weekly

We locate God in the power of liberation. Every expansion from the limited, self-centered, habitual and self-serving "me" indicates the presence of a power greater than ourselves. Every such expansion is also an experience of connection, well-being and transformation. Every such expansion is also fundamentally a mystery, no matter how I prepare for its coming.

—S.P.W.

liberation from bondage and to embody the belief that *avadim hayinu b'mitzrayim* (“We were slaves in Egypt”). We literally are freed from working—from the work of

Often, while studying Shabbat observance in a community, the issue of the *Shabbos goy* is raised. The *halakha*—Jewish law—allows for a variety of legal fictions that make actions permissible that appear to be forbidden. The *Shabbos goy* is a non-Jewish worker who performs acts that are traditionally understood as prohibited work. (Examples include feeding a fire [a vital winter activity before the invention of central heating], turning on an oven, performing maintenance on the synagogue and doing some cooking chores.) On the one hand, employing a *Shabbos goy* facilitates life in some Jewish communities and households on Shabbat. On the other, it calls into question the concept of allowing those who work for us to have a Shabbat, and, for many, it causes discomfort by creating a divide between Jew and non-Jew.  
—N.H.M.

Shabbat is first introduced to the Israelites immediately after they escape Pharaoh’s chariots at the Reed Sea. In chapter 16 of Exodus, Moses is informed that in response to the people’s complaints about being hungry, God would send down “bread from the heavens,” a special substance the Israelites call “manna.” Each day, they were to collect enough for that day and not hoard any overnight because all manna that was left over would rot. On Friday, the people are informed that they should collect enough for two days, and lo and behold, it was still good the next day because, as Moses explained, “Today is a Shabbat of God, and you will not find it in the field.” (Exodus 16:25) The manna comes not just as a miraculous daily meal, but also as a lesson in “enough”—in not grasping more than is needed and then, on Shabbat, having faith that what we have will suffice. Our two loaves of hallah on *erev Shabbat* hark back to this lesson, inviting us to accept as enough that which we have, without needing to acquire more for a period of one day.  
—T.S.

In premodern Europe, where Jews lived in close contact with other Jews, commerce shut down on Shabbat due to the weight of religious expectation. Thus, both rich and poor Jews rested on Shabbat. In an open and industrial society, commerce and industry churn on nonstop. Poor Jews who migrated to America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were expected by their employers to work on Saturdays. For many, this was a painful and unprecedented conflict.  
—D.W.

our employment and any other activity in which we are constructing something or repairing it. Beyond that, the day offers us regularly scheduled rest, as well as an opportunity for good food, interpersonal connection, song, prayer, contemplation, study, self-reflection, pleasant recreation, and play—all of the things available to a person of leisure who is not burdened with the pressures of earning a living. It is truly a reminder of the liberation from slavery.

Yes, Shabbat involves liberation from earning a living, but also, so important in our current culture, liberation from the constant buzz and interaction of social media. For so many people, taking a day off from work is imaginable, but detaching from email, texting and the Internet seems impossible. And yet this is exactly where Shabbat can offer respite and reorientation—in relation to the seeming urgency of email and the types of information most of us feel we need to constantly take in. Shabbat offers an opportunity for very different input. —M.M.

In the words of *The New Haggadah* (the 1941 Reconstructionist Haggadah), the experience of the Pesach Seder involves liberation from all those things that warp the mind but leave the flesh alive. —D.D.M.

The idea of personal liberation is one of Judaism's greatest challenges. It is a constant reminder that each of us is enslaved in many ways in our own lives, both externally and internally, and that the challenge to free ourselves from our own enslavements is a lifelong task. —S.C.R.

Our generation knows unprecedented leisure through all kinds of laborsaving devices. I do not know how much energy it took my forebears to get the clothes really clean without the aid of any electric devices, or how long it took to harvest crops, process them into foodstuff, guard against spoilage and ultimately prepare three meals a day. Yet I know that the time freed up by technology is also consumed by it, and our lives are full of demands for our attention and the expectation of instant responsiveness. *Mitzrayim* can also mean “narrowness,” and the liberation from Egypt led to a place of *merhav Ya*, a wide-open, God-filled place. Observing Shabbat—setting limits so as to create expansiveness—seems extremely important in the digital era. —D.W.

Furthermore, the biblical command not to engage in work applies not only to the Israelites, but also to their servants. As we recall that we were once slaves, our commitment to human dignity is embodied in the extension of Shabbat rest to everyone in the community.

It is intriguing that keeping Shabbat is a commandment, and that the prohibition against working one day a week is included in the Ten Commandments. Why do people need to be commanded to rest? On the face of it, rest would seem to be a pleasurable thing to do, something we shouldn't need much encouragement for. The incessant urge to do, to produce, to make and take, must be a very primal human urge. If our ancestors were in need of this commandment in a world that moved at a much slower pace than our own, how much more so are we in need of it today!  
—T.S.

The version of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy implies that the *purpose* of the Sabbath is to let servants rest “in order that your male and female servant rest as you do.” Not only does Shabbat apply to us and our servants, it also extends to our animals, who are not to be required to work for us on Shabbat. Shelly Yachimovitch, a leader of the Israeli Labor Party, commented on the need for a weekly day of rest and sharply contrasted the depth of the Torah commandment with our overworked present: “What cattle received 3,000 years ago, even the high-tech guy doesn't get today.”  
—J.A.S.

This lesson can impact our lives outside of the specific realm of Shabbat, reminding us that no workers should be slaves.  
—B.P.

## *The Terms of the Perpetual Covenant (Brit Olam)*

The Exodus from Egyptian slavery was also the beginning of the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people. Shabbat is a sign of that perpetual covenant—*brit olam*. (Exodus 31:15) The terms of that relationship are particularly clear on Shabbat: Just as on Shabbat we commemorate our liberation from Egyptian slavery, so on

Normally, covenants are reciprocal, with both parties dependent on one another to some degree. Yet how can this be true of Shabbat, a covenant between finite human beings and an infinite God? I am reminded of the bumper sticker that says, “Where is God? Wherever you let God in.” —J.M.

There is a difference between a *sign* of the covenant and the *terms* of the covenant. As with any durable relationship, the terms are continuously renegotiated as the parties change and grow. The way we might have observed Shabbat at one stage of life may not be the way we currently observe it. In this perspective, Shabbat is more a symbol of the covenant than a sign. As Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman teaches, symbols come before signs: Symbols speak to feelings, identity, familiarity and a sense of belonging. Signs are the explanations we create for the symbols we experience. —R.H.

For me, *brit* (covenant) first evokes mutual relationship. How do we feel that, enact that and make room for that sense of connection and relationship? That happens mostly through action/mitzvah, since the *brit* has terms for behavior, but I wouldn’t want to lose the anchor of *brit* as connection—ways in which we make ourselves transparent to God and ways in which we open ourselves to mystery and awe. —M.M.

Through the way Jewish tradition tells the story of the Exodus from Egypt, it teaches us that our story is everyone’s story and that all human beings have the divine right to freedom and liberation from their own enslavements. —S.C.R.

Shabbat we remember our commitment to work for the liberation of all who are enslaved, persecuted or oppressed today. The celebration of our own freedom on Shabbat comes with the reminder that it is not to be taken for granted.

*A Foretaste of Paradise: The Joyous Appreciation of Life's Blessings (Oneg Shabbat)*

During the Shabbat morning service, we sing, “*Yism’hu b’mal’khut’kha*”: “Those who keep the Shabbat enjoy your realm; they call it delight. All members of a people who sanctify the seventh day are satisfied and delighted by your goodness.”

Even as Shabbat reminds us that on the six days of creation we must work for justice, it also reminds us that adequate self-care is necessary in order to be effective in this work. —D.W.

The first Passover in Egypt, before we were actually physically liberated, set up a system in which each Passover does not just celebrate a memory, but imagines a future time when all will be free. (“Next year in Jerusalem” articulates this metaphorically.) Shabbat is called *me’eyn olam haba*, a taste of the world to come. Each Shabbat is an opportunity to imagine a world without slavery, without injustice, in which all will be free to observe Shabbat or in which every day will be like Shabbat. —J.G.K.

A similar *kavana*/theme can be found in another phrase from the Shabbat liturgy: “Let us be satisfied with your goodness (*sab’enu mituvekha*).” This is a day when we practice being satisfied and not always wanting something else. Though things can be a wonderful blessing, our satisfaction comes not from things but from goodness. —J.A.S.



Shabbat is a most enjoyable, blessed gift. As traditional Jewish imagery puts it, God loves us, so God gave us the seventh day to be happy, to be transported into another realm of living. The ideal for Shabbat is that we not worry about work or business or money, not use our free time to catch up on our errands, not travel or transport things from one place to another. In all of the prayers we recite on Shabbat, we do not even ask for anything; on Shabbat we simply praise, appreciate and give thanks, expressing the value of *hodaya* (gratitude). We act as if we have no

It is important not to let the difficulty in living the “ideal” version of Shabbat keep us from incorporating some elements of Shabbat into our lives. Sometimes it is enough to choose one new way of celebrating or acknowledging Shabbat at a time.  
—S.C.R.

For those of us immersed in consumer culture, praising, appreciating and giving thanks may not be so simple. We are habituated to evaluating and critiquing our experiences. While a pointed critique might roll off the tongue, a well-turned compliment often does not. The language of the Shabbat liturgy can encourage our capacities to accept, wonder and be grateful.  
—H.S.V.

It takes practice, weekly practice, to become skilled at setting aside workday concerns. As one gains skill, the anticipation of Shabbat lets one step back, take a deep breath and enjoy its rhythms, as well as the rhythm it gives to a week. —D.D.M.

Shabbat should be a day of pleasure and joy. That is part of the reason that sexual pleasure and intimacy are part of the delight of the day. They point to the connection between physical and spiritual delight.  
—M.M.

Keeping Shabbat as a practice implies that it is something we work at week by week. Cultivating an awareness of Shabbat as a state of mind can be something we work at moment by moment. The *mida* (quality) of *hodaya* (gratitude), for example, can be intentionally nurtured that way. Whenever we pause and let go of the grip of our busyness and grasping intentions, we can invite in a Shabbat of the mind in which we relax regarding the conditions of our lives in that moment. To pause, simply, for one breath, and to notice something for which we are grateful, however insignificant, is to invite in a moment of Shabbat for the mind.  
—M.K.

cares or concerns—and when we become skilled in this practice, we are actually able to put our preoccupations on hold, living more fully in the present moment, tasting food more acutely and noticing the blessedness of experiences that we otherwise take for granted. We might say that on Shabbat, we experience divine love. In many Jewish traditions, Shabbat represents a foretaste of paradise, where Jews have believed that figuratively speaking, one bathes in divine light for all eternity. The Shabbat experience that we seek to create should therefore reflect how we imagine heaven.

When we experience Shabbat by living fully in the present moment and make doing so a spiritual practice, we can then extend the experience into our everyday reality. We can bring Shabbat into every moment. —B.P.

My family had wide-ranging conversations over the dinner table. They were usually gregarious and energizing, but occasionally arguments would break out. Sometimes the arguments were about politics, sometimes merely sibling rivalry. When the temperature would creep upward on Friday nights, my Bubby would always say, “*Sha*, not on *Shabbos*.” For her, heaven was a place with no one yelling at each other! —D.W.

It isn’t heaven as a supernatural place that matters. It is the opportunity to imagine what a perfect vacation day, a perfect day of enjoying life in all its wonder might look like, and choosing to incorporate as many of those elements as you can into your own personal Shabbat. —S.C.R.

*Shabbat oneg* involves joy, delight and gratitude consciously enhanced by the day’s experiences. That is the sense in which Shabbat is the embodiment of wholeness. For some Jews, the word “heaven” contains Christian associations. (Heaven is where the good dead people go.) By contrast, I connect *olam haba* (the world to come, Eden, paradise) to the embodiment of wholeness, that which is eternal and complete. —M.M.

## *Palpable Holiness* (Shabbat Kodesh)

“*Z’khor et yom hashabbat l’kad’sho.*” “Remember the Sabbath day in a way that sanctifies it.” (Exodus 20:8, recited as part of the traditional Ashkenazic Kiddush prayer on Saturday afternoon)

Sanctity (*kedusha*) is difficult to define. It is commonly associated with space. At a holy site, we might take off our shoes (Moses at the Burning Bush), wrap ourselves in a tallit (prayer shawl), cleanse ourselves (the Israelites at Mount Sinai), refrain from work-oriented speech, elevate our thoughts, and pray. When we leave the sacred space, we may carry some of the experience with us, but we know that we are no longer in that physical space. We can feel the difference between the mundane and the holy. In fact, the different, separate nature of the holy is what makes it sacred; the holy points us beyond the everyday to something greater, something that’s not so easy to remember or express, something that transcends and/or underlies the apparent reality in which we live.

One ancient meaning of sanctity is “belonging to God.” “*Shabbat kodesh*” would then mean something like “Sabbath that belongs to God” or “God-time Sabbath.” What does “God-time” mean to you? —J.A.S.

One of the radical innovations of the talmudic rabbis was to transfer *kedusha* from a property of sacred spaces (Temple, altar, land) to one of sacred times (Shabbat, holidays, daily prayer times). This is still a great gift to those of us in the Diaspora, and all those seeking to avoid the potential idolatries of blood and soil. —J.M.

Do we see holiness in something that is different from everything else, or do we see holiness in things that we normally see, but now see in a different way? —R.H.

What makes time sacred? In his book *The Sabbath*, the great thinker Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel followed a line of Hasidic interpretations. These define Shabbat as the temporal equivalent of the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*), and Heschel called Shabbat “a palace in time.” While he was a committed Zionist, he rejected the line of thought that bemoaned the Jewish loss of a homeland after the destruction of the Second Temple and before the establishment of the State of Israel. Heschel believed that it was fortuitous that for 2,000 years, Jews were not attached to the places where they lived. Instead, he maintained, the Jewish calendar became a palace in time, and Shabbat became our temporal palace. It went with us wherever we sojourned while we lived in the Diaspora.

The binary division between “space” and “time” as presented by Heschel is not neutral but hierarchical: Heschel implies that “time” trumps “space.” Ironically, many English editions of Heschel’s essay “The Sabbath” are bound together with his essay on the Land of Israel, “The Earth is the Lord’s.” One could make a plausible argument that Judaism is as much concerned with space as with time, and that it depends on what is under discussion as to where the emphasis falls. That said, Shabbat is certainly the primary prism through which Jewish tradition views the entire category of time. —R.H.

Shabbat can be conceived of as an island in time. Shabbat is a day for itself, a time to be “in the moment” or “in the day.” We avoid doing things in preparation for the days after Shabbat. This is the basis of the Shabbat practices policy at my congregation in Willimantic, Connecticut. (See *A Guide to Jewish Practice, Volume I*, pages 615–636). —J.A.S.

One of our objectives for Shabbat, then, is to construct a temporal equivalent to a sacred pilgrimage site. As Friday sundown approaches, all of our preparations can be seen as the equivalent of entering a synagogue sanctuary or a holy shrine. Reality is altered with the lighting of the Shabbat candles. Because of the elaborate symbol and ritual system of Shabbat, time itself takes on a different quality, and crossing that boundary in time, we behave as if we have entered the sacred palace of the Blessed Holy One.

In the scheme of Jewish time, Shabbat is the primary fountain from which all sanctity springs; we look forward to the holiness of Shabbat all week long, and we yearn to keep Shabbat with us as long as we can, not rushing to end it at the earliest possible moment on Saturday evening.

Shabbat really does give meaning to every day of the week. It turns every week into a sacred pilgrimage. The week moves toward it and then is suffused with its light.  
—S.P.W.

Try the following as you walk down a street, or look into a shop window, or peer at a field as you drive by on a Friday evening as the sun sets, after you have set your intention to bring in Shabbat: Imagine that something magical has descended to make this ordinary place shine with an inner glow. Look closely and see how the place has colors, smells and sanctity that you didn't notice before. Now zoom out and see how everything has been imbued with that sanctity. Your intention to bring in Shabbat has changed the entire world as you perceive it.  
—J.M.S.

What can we do to shift our orientation to time from a cramped one in which we experience the press of minutes, hours and weeks to a more expansive orientation in which time is measured in epochs and eons? Can we reorient our sense of time from political to geological cycles? We can get out into the natural world. This, for me, is the role of a Shabbat hike.  
—H.S.V.

Shabbat ends slowly and on its own time. The liminal time of twilight following sunset invites us to gradually anticipate bidding Shabbat farewell.  
—J.G.K.

*Living in Jewish Time*  
(Hamavdil Beyn Kodesh L'hol)

Many Jews who are committed to living a rich and full Jewish life do not believe that Jewish laws and customs are literally commanded by God. They face a daily challenge: Given that the world in which we live is radically different from the world of our ancestors, how can we hope to relate to our inherited beliefs and practices? Are we just picking and choosing those aspects of the vast Jewish heritage with which we happen to agree? And if so, aren't we abandoning most of the opportunity to be shaped by the wisdom of our heritage? The Reconstructionist saying, "Tradition has a vote but not a veto," depends upon our ability to hear tradition's voices, an extremely tall order when so much of our heritage is expressed in idioms of an inherited culture whose terms and categories are difficult to understand, and whose values sometimes are unacceptable to us.

Because Judaism is a civilization, however, the wisdom of Jewish traditions is also available to us in ways that are not directly cognitive. Living a Jewish life entails far more than affirming certain principles of belief and observing Jewish rituals. It involves seeing reality through Jewish lenses. This happens gradually, for good and bad, as the result of experiences in a Jewish context. (You see an almond tree? Perhaps you think about *Tu Bishvat* [New Year of Trees] songs that mention almond trees. You hear a tune or inhale a scent that you can't quite place, but it takes you back to Jewish summer camp or to your grandmother's apartment.) We immerse ourselves in our her-

itage in order to become Jewishly acculturated, so that even while most aspects of our lives would be unintelligible to our ancestors, we can nevertheless integrate their voices into our consciousness.

The most powerful agent of Jewish acculturation is the Jewish calendar. It allows us to follow ancient rhythms that orient our lives in many subliminal ways, and thus to sense the resonance of countless generations who followed the same rhythms. To live in Jewish time means, for example, that the heat of summer (in the Northern Hemisphere) reminds us of the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem (*Tisha B'Av*) and leads us to the self-examination that precedes the High Holy Days. The weeks preceding Pesach have us enslaved in preholiday preparation, and the seven weeks between Pesach and Shavuot have us moving toward the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai. Following the annual cycle of the reading of the Torah has us thinking about the matriarch Sarah in October and November, and Miriam, Moses' sister, in June. We inevitably bring new interpretations to the understanding of the holiday cycle and the re-reading of Torah, but in doing so, we are being acted upon by the sacred texts and practices that we encounter. We are becoming ever more Jewishly acculturated.

When we align ourselves with the rhythm of the sacred seasons of Judaism, we begin to see the world through Jewish eyes. We allow ourselves to bring to mind personal Jewish memories from our past to add color and emotional connections to our present, and we feel a greater sense of belonging, recognizing we are a small part of the ever-flowing, ancient stream of Jewish life.

—S.C.R.

There is no more prominent and frequent occurrence in the Jewish calendar than the weekly arrival of Shabbat. Along with the remaining six days of the week, Shabbat provides the basic rhythm of Jewish time. Six days of work, one day of rest: mundane, holy. Hurry up, slow down. Get distracted, return to the Source of All. Worry about yourself and your loved ones, remember your blessings. In the *Havdala* blessing that marks the end of Shabbat, God is praised for distinguishing between holy and mundane (*hamavdil beyn kodesh l'hol*).

Traditionally, Jews bask in the light of the previous Shabbat through Tuesday, and on Wednesday they begin to prepare for the following Shabbat: cleaning, shopping, laundering, studying. A richly celebrated Shabbat colors all the days of the week. When we live from one Shabbat to the next, it becomes our primary temporal marker. Even as we look forward to next winter's vacation or to a family celebration, we are also thinking about where and with whom we will be eating in several days. And even as

Kadya Molodowsky's poem "Song of the Sabbath" imagines a week full of drudgery and destruction. "This is my whole week," she writes, "the dove's flight dying." On Shabbat, everything is restored to wholeness, even the damaged dove, and she enters into a world of peace and renewal. —D.W.

I have never liked the word "mundane," but I recognize Shabbat as the antithesis of the "everyday." The *Havdala* blessing is a reminder that time we set apart from the everyday becomes sacred by definition. That is one way we have the power to bring holiness into our lives. —S.C.R.

I studied an early Jewish mystical teaching that compares Shabbat to a fountain that waters the rest of the week. In this image, Shabbat is not the culmination of the week, but rather its center. What would it be like to have Shabbat be the center of our week rather than its culmination? —N.C.M.



we are calculating how we will find the hours to devote to a project we have that has a deadline in ten days, our calculations take account of Friday sundown to Saturday evening as time that we won't use for work. Shabbat affects the reality of weekdays as well.

Living in Jewish time inevitably affects our outlook, our priorities, our values and, often enough, our blood pressure. The rhythms of our observance shape us more completely than the words that we pray or the values that we espouse.

### *Returning to Our Ultimate Purposes (T'shuva)*

The observance of Shabbat has often been associated with the purification or elevation of the soul, suggesting that immersing our consciousness in a different spiritual reality for 25 hours each week has a substantial effect on the quality of our spiritual lives. The proof text our rabbis

I am often struck by the contrast between Shabbat around the world, where Sunday is also a weekend day, and Shabbat in Israel, where Sunday is a weekday and Friday has both weekday and weekend qualities. In the Diaspora, one who works a weekday schedule often has a chance to rest on Sunday and recover from being overwhelmed with Shabbat guests, food, drink and conversation. In Israel, Friday daytime is a time to prepare both for Shabbat and for the week ahead. Shabbat is the single day to rest and recover from the week; there is a need for Shabbat itself to be the opportunity to rejuvenate.

—J.G.K.

The rhythms of our lives are shaped by tradition and culture as well as by our unique biology and upbringing. Our lives are shaped by our responses to often-conflicting rhythms that provide frequent challenges. This *Guide* continually invites us to acknowledge these challenges and to make an effort toward more awareness in contemplating our choices.

—S.P.W.

gave for this notion comes from the Book of Exodus. (35:1) Immediately following the account of the Israelites' worship of the golden calf at Mount Sinai and the consequent divine wrath, the commandment to observe the Sabbath is repeated. Why? Because, commentators have taught, observing Shabbat is the most effective means we have for *t'shuva* (return, repentance). More than any other mitzvah, it has the power to lift us up out of whatever we find ourselves mired in during the week. Whatever our very real and pressing concerns are in any given week—professional, financial, interpersonal, or medical—Shabbat arrives to remind us to look at them from a different perspective, from the vantage point of the ultimate meaning and purpose of our lives. That way we can keep our concerns from becoming idolatrous attachments—golden calves, if you will.

Cognitive neuroscience appears to confirm the efficacy of this function of Shabbat. Neural pathways and synap-

Shabbat and *t'shuva* are deeply intertwined. Creation recurs (mythically but truly) every Shabbat. We are (mythically but truly) reborn every Shabbat. New eyes make change possible. Nothing ever is the same except the perception that we have seen this before. But we really have not. Life, reality and the universe are always in flux; therefore, there is always the possibility of beginning again. This is the core of the spiritual message, the evolution of consciousness, and the hope for a better world.  
—S.P.W.

Books like Richard Davidson's *The Emotional Life of Your Brain* and Daniel Siegel's *The Mindful Brain* are new sacred texts for 21st-century contemplatives, because they show that spiritual practice has more in common with nutrition and exercise than with magic and superstition. Shabbat is the opposite of "working out." You might call it "not working in." Yet the transformative effects of spiritual practice are measurable even by Western scientific methods.  
—J.M.

tic connections are formed through mental activity. When we respond to stimuli the same way over and over again, these pathways do not grow; instead, they form the basis of habits and set ways of being. However, it is also possible to cultivate new habits, which correlate to the formation of new neural connections in the brain. Changing our response patterns—doing *t'shuva*—physically changes the brain and increases the capacity for calm, attention, mindfulness and gratitude. But this kind of *t'shuva* doesn't have to wait for Rosh Hashana or Yom Kippur. Indeed, to be effective, it must be more frequent than that. When our regular weekly Shabbat observance includes not only external behaviors but also an inner cultivation of peaceful, restful, states of mind, it has the power to transform our minds.

The discoveries of cognitive neuroscience suggest that repeated alternative behaviors can create new neural highways through the brain. This insight is related not only to the issue of *t'shuva*, but also to the entirety of Shabbat. Those who take on as a regular repeated routine the decelerated rhythms of Shabbat can, over time, create new habits whose effect can extend beyond that one day to the rest of one's life.  
—R.H.

Shabbat as an instrument of *t'shuva* is amplified exponentially when Yom Kippur falls on a Shabbat.  
—R.H.

Shabbat is fundamentally a state of mind. It is a weekly opportunity for us to choose not only to live differently on that one day from the way we live during the rest of the week, but also to think differently on that day as well.  
—S.C.R.

## Community (Am M'kad'shey Sh'vi'i)

Shabbat prayers refer to the Jewish people as “*am m'kad'shey sh'vi'i*”—“the people who sanctify the seventh day.” That is, the prayers implicitly assert that Shabbat observance is one of the defining characteristics of a Jew. It certainly can be a primary factor in the building of a Jewish community (*kehila*). Those who mark Friday evening and/or Saturday join together. This occurs most publicly in the synagogue, where those who attend services come together for prayer and fellowship. Shabbat “regulars,” who spend hours together in Shabbat services and at the *oneg Shabbat* (eating and social time) that follows, become well acquainted and develop bonds of connection that do not rest on prior friendship or even on common back-

The great poet Hayim Nahman Bialik introduced a religiously inspired version of the *oneg Shabbat* in prestate Israel. On Saturday afternoons, he would gather people together in Tel Aviv for communal singing, learning and meals. The topics were frequently on the Bible or religious themes, but the approach was cultural. Our use of the term “*oneg Shabbat*” to refer to the social time following services stems from the *oneg Shabbat* groups started by Hayim Nahman Bialik, the national poet of the early Zionist movement. These groups were intended to invent a new, cultural way of observing Shabbat based on Jewish learning, singing, shared food and sometimes drama. The term probably migrated to Friday night skits, socializing and Israeli dancing at Zionist summer camps and from there to synagogue life. I would love to see us reclaim the civilizational breadth and spirit of Bialik’s *oneg Shabbat*. —D.W./J.A.S.

The *Mi Shebeyraḥ* blessing, discussed below, can be a source of community building. In some congregations and *havurot*, individuals going up for an aliyah receive personal blessings for milestone celebrations or in preparation for such major transitions as surgery or retirement. The individuals mark the milestones in community, and community members are informed about them and can offer congratulations or support. A similar dynamic can happen through the *Mi Shebeyraḥ L'holim*, the prayers for healing, when names of ailing individuals are recited aloud. —D.W.

ground or interests. A warm, welcoming group of people is the foundation of a thriving community. Some communities build on this by catering or hosting potluck meals on Friday evenings before or after services, or on Saturday afternoons after the Shabbat morning service.

Shabbat observance also builds community in other ways. Not everyone finds what they are looking for at worship services. People who celebrate a Shabbat dinner in their homes on Friday evenings gravitate to others who can join them or host them. Sometimes *havurot* (small groups of individuals or households) form to meet for the Friday evening meal each month in one another's homes. Such groups sometimes become powerful extended families, and their deeply felt connections sustain subcommunities upon which the larger community depends. What makes a Shabbat meal different from other meals is that on Shabbat the participants are not rushing off to do anything else. There is plenty of time for talking and singing. There is a sense of *oneg*, of joy.

Similarly, if our observance of Shabbat means that we only engage in activities in the spirit of Shabbat, then we

While many members of our congregation, both Jewish and non-Jewish, celebrate Shabbat in a variety of ways over the course of the year, as a community we designate one Shabbat in the spring "Shabbat Unplugged," when we encourage one another to "unplug" in some way from email, from taking work home, from shopping, from doing the laundry during an entire Shabbat. In addition to individual "unplugging," we organize Friday night dinners in members' homes and encourage people to "plug in" to Shabbat morning services or to an afternoon walk in the woods, a bike ride or a Shabbat nap. The shared sense that we are enjoying Shabbat as a community, even if we are not all physically together, fosters a lovely sense of connection. —T.S.

are often looking for others to share the experience of a long walk or a trip to a park, museum or zoo. In the words of the liturgy, those who observe the Shabbat enjoy themselves together.

### *Linking the Chain of Generations (L'dor Vador)*

*“L’dor vador nagid godlekha ul’netzah n’tzaim k’dushat’kha nakdish.”* “From generation to generation we proclaim your greatness, and we will sanctify your holiness forever and ever.”

We end the *Kedusha* part of the *Shabbat Amida* (standing, individually recited prayer) with this line, linking our observance of Shabbat with all preceding generations and generations yet unborn. Every ritual and prayer contains the power to transport us from the present moment into a sense of eternity at the moment when we remember that we are doing what we imagine our ancestors did and what we hope our descendants will do. We may use the candlesticks or Kiddush cup that we have inherited, or sing an uncle’s melody or cook a grandmother’s recipe. And when we have no intergenerational history—if we are Jews by choice or Jews by birth without memories of Shabbat

I have found that for Jews by choice, the ability to create their own new rituals and traditions for Shabbat is one of the most powerful gifts of becoming Jewish. Every ritual you create adds one more layer of sacred connection to the Jews throughout history who did exactly the same thing and passed down to us what we now call “tradition.”

—S.C.R.

observance in our families—the observance of Shabbat provides a palpable path of entry into the bosom of the age-old community of Shabbat observers (*am m'kad'shey sh'vi'i*).

The opportunity that resides in this nostalgic power is that we are not only connecting to generations past and future. We are also connecting their most cherished experiences and values to our own. When we rejoice at the setting of the Friday sun and the sacred rest it signals, we imagine how they experienced this moment—how their images of paradise may enrich our own.

### *A Vision of Redemption* (Sam'heyenu bishu'atekha)

Eviatar Zerubavel, a sociologist of time, argues that Shabbat may be the most important Jewish contribution to human civilization. He finds no evidence of the existence

Inevitably, connections across imagined generations may involve projecting values onto the past that weren't present then. Plenty of Jewish immigrants, for example, spent Friday night at the Yiddish theater, not in shul or around the Sabbath table.

—D.D.M.

My favorite translation of the word “mitzvah” is “that which connects,” from a Hasidic play on the Aramaic word “*tz'vat*” (Hebrew letters *tzadi-vav-vav-tav*), meaning to “join” or “attach.” In this playful translation, a mitzvah is an act that connects us. The mitzvah of Shabbat connects us in so many ways: to our ancestors, to our communal past, to family and community in the present and to our children's future as we create Shabbat memories for them.

—T.S.

The ancient Babylonians apparently had days of restricted activity on the seventh, 14th, 21st and 28th day of each lunar month, but these were also connected to the moon, leaving the “week” of the new month longer than the others, and maintaining cyclical time outside of human intention.

—J.A.S.

of the week before its introduction in Israelite culture (*The Seven Day Circle: The History and Meaning of the Week*). The week does not correspond to anything in nature. The day follows sunrise and sunset, the (lunar) month corresponds to the cycle of the moon, and the solar year follows the rotation of the earth. But the week is arbitrary; seven days is an artificial period of time.

The biblical introduction of the week and its climactic Shabbat signals the introduction of linear time, which liberates us from the regularly repeating cycles of nature. The Jewish calendar looks forward to redemption, to the end of time, to a rupture in the order of reality when the world will be different, to a time when peace and justice will reign and the presence of God will be completely manifest. In rabbinic terms, this is the redemption that will occur in the future that is anticipated by the redemption from Egyptian bondage.

The Jewish tendency to look forward to a world that is repaired and healed and to work toward that world (*tikun olam*) stems from the development of the view of time as linear, as moving forward, rather than as being only cyclical, repeating itself. Shabbat is not only our attempt to create a reality every seventh day that feels as if we're in heaven; its very existence, punctuating the humanly crafted seven-day week, stands as a weekly affirmation that we are not completely subject to the elements of nature. We



can jump off the carousel and move toward redemption. We know that we can do so because we do it every Friday at sundown. It is what we pray for in the *Shabbat Amida* when we say, “*Samḥeynu bishu’atekha*,” “Cause us to rejoice in your salvation.”

### *Rest and Renewal (Menuḥa)*

“*Uvayom hash’vi’i shavat vayinafash*.” “On the seventh day, God rested and was replenished.” (Exodus 31:17)

The *menuḥa* (rest) of Shabbat certainly includes napping and catching up on one’s sleep, not an insignificant enterprise in an era when studies tell us that most of us are sleep-deprived. It thus also contributes to the value of *b’riyut*—health and wellness. But Shabbat *menuḥa* includes many other activities: praying, eating, leisurely conversation, singing, reading, studying, playing and

While Shabbat emphasizes living in a cycle of humanly constructed linear time, I find that it also connects me more deeply to the cycles of nature; when I slow down on Shabbat, I am better able to notice the natural processes happening in my environment and to remember how connected I am to natural cycles. —N.C.M.

Adolescents, with their sensitivity to perceived hypocrisy, often pull up short at the idea of mandated rest. They will argue that it takes added work (by which they mean effort) to observe Shabbat. With this in mind, it might be helpful to conceive of *menuḥa* not just as rest, but also as refraining from acts of creation and destruction. During Shabbat, we change our orientation to the created world. We work on being, not doing. —H.S.V.

other activities that renew the soul. The break from the weekday routine allows us to attend to, refresh and deepen our spirits.

What might the writers of Exodus 31:17 have meant in using the word “*vayinafash*” (replenished) to describe God on the seventh day? The Hebrew word has the literal meaning of being “re-souled,” renewing one’s energy, being revived. After a taxing work week, what does it take to make you feel whole and refreshed?

The halakhic literature recognizes that Shabbat is no different from any other day, except that we declare it so. The great medieval halakhic authority Maimonides, for example, addresses the challenge faced by a traveler who loses track of the days. His advice is that you should start counting from the day on which you realize that you have lost track, and then observe Shabbat on the seventh day of the new counting. It is not that it doesn’t matter which day you choose to observe Shabbat. The point is that, even if you are observing Shabbat on a different day than everyone else, you can’t give it up altogether because of your miscalculation. Counting to the seventh day is an essential act in the life of a Jew even when—or precisely because—it is arbitrary. —J.J.S.

Maimonides’s perspective that Shabbat occurs because we declare it so is in tension with the rabbis who understood that Shabbat happens with or without us, while holidays are sanctified by the Jewish people, who set the calendar. (See, for example, Talmud *Beytza* 17a.) —J.G.K.

The Torah teaches us that human beings are created in the image of God. Just as the Torah describes God as having created Shabbat, we human beings have creative power to set one time apart from another and literally to create sacred time in our own lives. —S.C.R.

In Exodus 23:12, “*vayinafash*” is applied to servants and strangers resting on Shabbat; elsewhere it is used to describe David and his weary fighters resting up. “*Nefesh*” can also mean “self,” which was often its meaning in biblical Hebrew. Perhaps Shabbat is an opportunity to return to our true selves (*vayinafash*), to become ourselves again. —J.G.K./J.A.S.

In his book *The Kuzari*, the medieval philosopher and poet Judah Halevi explains this as precisely the reason why Shabbat was given to us. He sees Shabbat as a gift of time that allows us to devote adequate attention to the care of our bodies and souls. For Halevi this involves contemplation of the divine presence through prayer and meditation. We each have our own methods of renewal. The *menuḥa* (rest) of Shabbat is an opportunity for renewal as well as rest.

### *Play (M'saḥeket B'tevel Artzo)*

Sometimes it is difficult to play, to engage in enjoyable activities that have no purpose. Traditional Jewish values are very clear that “wasting time” (*bitul z'man*) is to be avoided because that time can and should be devoted to the study of Torah (*limud Torah*). In medieval Europe, ethical treatises cautioned fathers not to waste their time playing with their own children! In our own time, potentially playful activities lose their playfulness as we turn them into accomplishments by honing our skills to run the race faster or to lower the handicap.

Our work has no end. As *Pirkey Avot* teaches, “The day is short and the task is great. . . . It is not up to you to complete the task; neither are you free to neglect it.” (2.15–16) Even when we finish a project, meet a deadline or fulfill an obligation, the next project may already have its grip on us. For those who fear the impact of “losing” one day a week, the value of *menuḥa* as renewal provides a useful rationale for taking time off. Unless our work involves saving lives, *pikuah nefesh*, we might discover that we can indeed afford to give up one day for our own rest and renewal. —B.P.

The Book of Proverbs imagines Wisdom as a person. It says that Wisdom was created before all other things, (Proverbs 8:22) and it often portrays Wisdom as the blueprint for the created world. Proverbs quotes Wisdom as saying, “*M’saḥeket b’tewel artzo.*” “I played before [God] at every moment. I played with the inhabited world and delighted in humankind.” (Proverbs 8:30–31) Similarly, the psalmist has no problem saying that God created the mythical beast Leviathan so that God could play with the sea creature. (Psalms 104:26) Clearly, biblical writers did not think it inappropriate or disrespectful to suggest that God plays.

Shabbat is the perfect time to play—to do things we enjoy without worrying about what we are accomplishing. And if we are to believe the writers of biblical wisdom literature, when we play, we manifest a divine quality as surely as when we love or act compassionately.

Some Jews who grew up in traditional homes have memories of Shabbat as primarily filled with rules about what not to do, with restrictions and “do not’s.” How much more joy will we create if we see Shabbat as a weekly opportunity to enjoy doing what we don’t have time for during the week as we celebrate life, play and enjoy life’s blessings with family and friends. —S.C.R.

One of the highlights of school *Shabbatonim* is the inevitable pick-up game of Ultimate Frisbee on Shabbat afternoon. Staff and students play together, no one keeps score, and we play until we are too tired to continue. —H.S.V.

### *Longing for the Blessed Holy One* (Tzam'a Nafshi)

In the symbolic imagery of the Shabbat liturgy, we welcome the Shabbat Bride at sunset on Friday, and we escort the Shabbat Queen as she departs on Saturday evening. The assumption of these images is that the Jews who are praying are heterosexual men spiritually romancing a Shabbat who is their female consort. This is not the place to undertake a thorough deconstruction and reconstruction of this worldview. Suffice it to say that Jews of different genders may want to re-imagine Shabbat in a variety of gendered or nongendered ways.

If we can move beyond this obstacle, it may be meaningful to recall that the mystics' gendered Shabbat *also* is identified with the *Shekhina*, the feminine aspect of God that in their system was closest to, and most manifest in, our physical, created world. Thus, for them Shabbat is the manifest presence of God. Welcoming Shabbat is a way of discerning the divine presence, a presence that is always with us everywhere, but one that we can more easily notice and embrace when we enter into the temporal

Much like my feelings about Shabbat preparation rituals (hallah baking, candle lighting) that are traditionally associated with women's observance, I often find myself caught between feeling invisible as a gay man by the traditional Jewish norm of heterosexuality and feeling happy as a feminist that, even as early as the rabbinic period, important roles and images of women existed in Jewish practice and thought.

—J.G.K.

sphere of Shabbat—literally embrace, as we sing “*L’kha Dodi*” (“Come, My Friend/Beloved”) on Friday evening, welcoming the face of Shabbat as if she or he were a lover returning from a six-day journey.

In the terms of the Lurianic kabbalists of 16th-century Tzfat in northern Israel, the *Kadosh Barukh Hu* (the transcendent, awesome aspect of God) is united on Shabbat with the *Shekhina* (the accessible, beloved aspect of God). We might express this as the way that our practice of Shabbat helps us to embody a concrete version of holiness that is otherwise far too abstract to express in words. Sometimes the truth is best expressed in song and dance.

When singing “*L’kha Dodi*,” the quintessential Jewish mystical vision of the heterosexual union of (male) God with (female) Shabbat, I like to imagine *Shabbat Hamalka*, the Shabbat Queen, entering the sanctuary as a glorious drag queen. —T.S.

Even though I am praying indoors when I sing “*L’kha Dodi*,” I often seek to call up an image of what it feels like to be in a field at sunset experiencing the presence of the divine; this helps me to connect to the kabbalistic notion of *Shekhina*. —N.C.M.

Songwriter Benjamin Newman echoes the marriage metaphor in his song “*Shechinah*,” in which God transcendent may feel less accessible to us but God’s presence reunites with us each week: “The King is in His office, ‘cause the work is never finished / But the Queen has gone to walk among the twisting streets below; / And the light that is Her Presence fills the houses of the people / Who remember, when She visits—about every week or so.” —J.G.K.

While *Kabbalat Shabbat* literally means the “receiving of Shabbat,” which requires a readiness to receive Shabbat, “*L’kha Dodi*” has us running out into the fields to greet the beloved, as if calling across the meadow, “Hey, Beloved! I’m coming to meet you!” It is not delicate or reserved, but full of longing and love. We lift ourselves out of sadness and wake up. We put on garments of light and dance with the divine

## *A Coat of Many Colors*

Like all people, Jews span a range of different spiritual types. Some of us tend to manifest our spiritual journey in action, locating the divine presence in our acts of *g'milut hesed* (loving kindness), such as hosting guests for Shabbat, and *tikun olam* (repairing the world). Such people use the perpetual covenant of Shabbat as a reminder and spur to do the social justice work that is required of us. Some of us like to study and engage in intellectual activity, using the free time of Shabbat to engage in *talmud Torah* (Torah study). Others of us find meaning in an embodied spiritual practice, hiking or biking or cooking and eating

under the setting sun. It is sensuous, luscious and erotic. While it may be challenging to connect with images of God as the beloved, we can gather each and every experience of love that has kissed our lives as manifestations of God's love. We have become uncomfortable with erotic energy as part of our spiritual lives, or we are worried about the abuse of that energy, but the Tzfat mystics remind us how alive, intimate, transcendent and unitive spiritual experience can be. Eros is a fundamental quality of spiritual life. The prayers of "*Yedid Nefesh*" and "*L'kha Dodi*" enable us both to awaken and to direct that energy through prayer. —M.M.

For those whose spiritual lives are deeply connected to the work of social justice, Shabbat rest is a particular challenge and a gift. Full-time justice activists often suffer burnout, leaving little if any time for their own rest and renewal. Whether making a commitment to be home at a somewhat reasonable time on Friday to enjoy a Shabbat meal with a spouse or friends, or taking a few hours on Shabbat afternoon for meditation, yoga, or a walk in the woods, a Shabbat practice can be a vital part of creating a sustainable commitment to the work of peace and justice. —T.S.

Jewish tradition in general and Shabbat observance in particular raise the tension between the world as it is and the world as it could and should be. Shabbat provides an occasion to push the limits of our spiritual comfort zones. —J.G.K.

Shabbat meals that help us to taste our blessings, breathing in the beauty of the created world. And some of us are most comfortable expressing our spiritual needs emotionally, like those Lurianic kabbalists in Tzfat who dressed like bridegrooms and ecstatically danced Shabbat into town.

Of course, none of us is a pure spiritual type; we are each a mixture of all of the above types and many more. And, of course, none of us is static; each of us changes and grows, adopting new modes of experience while other modes in our repertoire diminish. Nevertheless, each of us may tend to believe (however secretly) that our way of experiencing the spirit of Shabbat is more compelling and elevated than others that we have not experienced personally. The miracle of Shabbat is that Jews of all types, in all the diversity of our approaches, are able to celebrate the seventh day together in our communities and contribute to the ideal of *klal Yisrael*—the unity and survival of the Jewish people.

We might believe that our way of experiencing Shabbat is less compelling, elevated, informed or authentic than that of others. The diversity of the Jewish people means that we can each learn, experiment and evolve in our own journey of Shabbat practice by observing others and ourselves without judgment. —J.G.K.



## Shomer Shabbat: *Who Is a Shabbat Observer?*

Our definition of a *shomer/et Shabbat* (observer of Shabbat) is someone who sets Shabbat aside as a special day and who is in a perpetual, lifelong process of discovering how the *kedusha* (sanctity) and *menuḥa* (rest) of Shabbat can best be experienced.

### *The Halakhic Shabbat Observer*

In the contemporary Orthodox world, a person is called *shomer/et Shabbat* (an “observer of Shabbat”) if he or she observes all of the halakhic prohibitions for Shabbat—not lighting a fire or turning on electricity, walking rather than riding in any kind of transportation, not carrying anything in a public space, and not cooking or writing or building or repairing anything. The designation is very significant. In much of the Orthodox world, only someone who is *shomer/et Shabbat* is regarded as trustworthy

Liberated from the confines of a halakhic Shabbat and dwelling in a highly pluralistic world, we are all challenged to be more accepting of difference and to be clearer about what we need for our own fulfillment. This stance depends on high self-esteem. Individuals who are ashamed or confused cannot claim their particularity in an egalitarian system. This is Judaism for grownups, which can give it ultimate value when it is not undermined by the less mature parts of others and ourselves. —S.P.W.

Using fire and electricity—particularly electronics—strikes me as a clear example of the work in our regular lives, with fire ancient, and electronics contemporary. —J.G.K.

While most Orthodox legal authorities forbid the use of electricity, bicycles and baby carriages on Shabbat, several permit it. —J.G.K.

about all other aspects of *halakha*. In much of that world, someone may keep a kosher home, buying only kosher-certified food and separating milk and meat, but if he or she is not *shomer/et Shabbat*, then other observant Jews won't trust that she or he is sufficiently meticulous in observance for them to eat in his or her home.

*Sh'mirat Shabbat* (Shabbat observance) in the above sense is not technically about how our actions on Shabbat affect our state of mind. For example, you are not permitted to ride on an elevator unless the elevator is set on continuous motion before Shabbat, or unless a non-Jewish person happens to enter the elevator and push the button, so that you can ride it without turning on electricity. You can't carry in a public place, *unless* an *eruv* (a boundary that marks the circumference of a neighborhood) has been created by hanging a wire, thereby creating the legal

My personal Shabbat practice has varied over the years, but my *kashrut* practice has been more constant. I am strict about *kashrut* in my home—among other reasons, because I love food and I love the Jewish people, so I want to make the food I prepare as accessible as possible. Many Orthodox Jews are happy to eat in my home.  
—J.G.K.

The halakhic principle of the *eruv* is that carrying is permitted on your own property but not in public spaces such as a road. The *eruv* turns a public space into a mutually owned private space by symbolically fencing it off. This allows traditionally observant Jews to push a baby carriage or carry a bottle of wine to a friend's house. The *eruv* legal fiction would not ordinarily be used by a nonhalakhic Shabbat observer, but that person might ask questions such as, "Is this too heavy a burden to carry so far on Shabbat?" Or, "Should I bring over my contribution to the potluck on Friday afternoon so that I don't have to schlep this big pot on Shabbat?" —D.A.T.

fiction that it is actually a private and not a public place. And while one may argue that these two examples may enhance one's Shabbat spirit—by allowing you to visit friends who live in a high-rise building, or by making it easier to leave your home—it would be more difficult to make that argument about an electrical timer that would turn on the television at a preset time so that you could view programs or sporting events without violating the prohibition of turning on electricity.

Because of the well-known and widespread use of the term “*shomer Shabbat*” in the Orthodox world, non-Orthodox Jews sometimes say, “We observe Shabbat—we light candles, make Kiddush and have a meal as a family on Friday night, and we often go to synagogue, but we are not *shomer Shabbat*.” In other words: “Shabbat occupies an important place in our week, but we do not observe Shabbat as Orthodox Jews do.” When non-Orthodox Jews cede to the Orthodox the right to define

While we often judge ourselves and one another as overly enmeshed in technology, electronics, television and the Internet during our work weeks, for some this might be one of the few opportunities they have during the week to watch their favorite shows or play their favorite games and still feel in the spirit of the day. —J.G.K.

Even within Orthodoxy, there is a wide range of practice regarding Shabbat observance. Orthodox Jews maintain that while *halakha* is authoritative, it is also subject to interpretation, and they often choose to follow the teachings of a particular rabbi or community. The non-Orthodox approach presented here presumes that committed liberal Jewish practice is as authoritative—legitimate, empowered and filled with meaning—as Orthodox practice. —D.W.

the term “*shomer Shabbat*,” we inadvertently denigrate not only the value and importance of our own ritual practice, but also our overall approach to Jewish living.

### *A New Definition of Shomer Shabbat*

In fact, it is entirely possible to cultivate a meaningful and transformative observance of Shabbat (some would say it is easier), even when one does not accept halakhic author-

It can be exceedingly difficult for non-Orthodox Jews to assert the validity of their approach to Jewish life in general, and specifically Shabbat, when living among Orthodox Jews. Often, the tolerance for non-Orthodox Jews involves their accommodation to an Orthodox common denominator. I am challenged daily in this regard in my home community of Pikesville and in my professional role in convening a pluralistic campus community. If we are to take ourselves seriously and invest in the long-term viability of a liberal approach to Judaism, the struggle against this standard must be undertaken. True pluralism emerges from mutual respect, not from Orthodox common-denominator Judaism. —J.M.S.

Promoting acceptance of diverse religious practice is an abiding interest of Reconstructionist Judaism. Mordecai Kaplan, the founding thinker of Reconstructionism, once declared that his efforts were dedicated to “making religious diversity safe for Judaism.” He and his collaborators insisted that varying expressions of Jewish living were characteristic of the Jewish past and were absolutely vital to the Jewish present and future. In an age of multivocality and wide-ranging experience, no one can or should insist on a single, exclusively legitimate expression of Judaism. —D.W.

I agree that definitions for *shomer Shabbat* should not be narrow, but when liberal (non-Orthodox) Jews define certain actions as within the spirit of Shabbat and certain actions as outside the spirit of Shabbat, we run the risk of judging ourselves by another set of subjective standards, and of creating our own orthodoxy. —J.G.K.

I am uncertain about the advisability of using classical halakhic terms for things that do not conform to classical halakhic meanings. It is one thing to claim a pluralism of possibilities for Shabbat, and to encourage diversity and honor differences. It is

ities' decisions about what is permitted and what is prohibited on Shabbat. That is precisely the subject of this *Guide*. From our perspective, it is appropriate and important to think of ourselves and others who observe Shabbat in a variety of ways also as *shomrey Shabbat* (observers of Shabbat) since we believe that a wide range of approaches to Jewish ritual observance is legitimate and encouraged.

Several issues emerge as a nonhalakhic Jew develops a practice of Shabbat observance.

another thing to take a term that has a specific meaning and apply it to something else, something that is different in whole or in part in a way that makes common conversation among Jews problematic. I am not convinced we need to argue over "joint custody" of a halakhic term as much as we ought to be identifying an alternative paradigm. "*Shomer*" and "*shomeret*" derive from a Hebrew root meaning "to guard" or "to protect" and only derivatively mean "to observe" or "to celebrate." So much of Jewish practice is (or is perceived to be) *lo ta'aseh* ("you cannot do . . ."), and too much of Jewish identity is negatively defined. "*Shomer*" and "*shomeret*" to me fall at the same end of the perceptual spectrum, suggesting that Shabbat is something under siege and that our role is to defend it. A Reconstructionist approach to Shabbat might choose to revalue the terms "*shomer Shabbat*" and "*shomeret Shabbat*," but could as easily, and perhaps more invitingly, find an alternative concept. —R.H.

I believe it is helpful to use the term "*shomer Shabbat*" to refer to those who follow some version of the *halakha* regarding Shabbat observance. For that large group of Jews who take Shabbat observance seriously outside the framework of *halakha*, I prefer the term "*zokher Shabbat*." In the two versions of the Ten Commandments, one uses the term "*shamor*," ("observe the Sabbath"), while the other uses the term "*zakhor*," ("remember the Sabbath"). Using a different term indicates deep engagement with the tradition but reflects the necessarily different approach of someone making values-based decisions. —D.A.T.

## *Approaches to Shabbat Prohibitions*

The original biblical commandment about Shabbat reads as follows:

*Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of your God; you shall not do any work. . . . For in six days God made the heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and God rested on the seventh day; therefore, God blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. (Exodus 20:8–11)*

The Book of Isaiah seems to understand the prohibition of work in this passage as a commandment to refrain from engaging in your own occupation. (Isaiah 58:13) In the authoritative interpretation of “work,” however,

In the “fourth commandment” of the Decalogue, the mitzvah to observe Shabbat is stated alongside the requirement to work during the other six days. —J.G.K.

The prohibitions of Shabbat arise from the actions used to build the *Mishkan*, a process of human building and creating that shares many similarities in description to the Genesis account of God’s creation of the world. The prohibitions of Shabbat are not only about not working (walking up stairs, for example, is more work than taking the elevator), but also about understanding *m’lakha* as involving actions that are world creating —M.M.

the rabbis defined work as any one of 39 activities in which the ancient Israelites engaged in constructing the *Mishkan* (according to the Torah narrative, the portable Tabernacle built in the wilderness, where worship occurred before the First Temple was built in Jerusalem). From these activities, which are specified in the Torah, they derived 39 foundational categories of “work” (*avot*

The sages of the Talmud understood these activities as prohibited by Torah law on Shabbat because the Torah’s instruction on building the *Mishkan* immediately precedes another commandment to keep Shabbat (Exodus 31:12–17), creating an apparent contrast between the preceding acts of work and the necessity and covenant of Shabbat. —J.G.K.

The association of the definitions of work with the building of the *Mishkan* is a fascinating rabbinic midrash that probably doesn’t really explain the origin of the traditional 39 categories. The arrangement of these 39 categories in Mishnah Shabbat 7:2 suggests that they involve all the activities involved in baking, sewing and writing a scroll, plus building, working with fire and transporting goods. In other words, they are the items that distinguish humans not intellectually or spiritually, but technologically—as transformers of our environment. —J.A.S.

One way to think about decisions around Shabbat practice is to consider how to understand the words here translated as “shall labor and do all your work.” Other possibilities include “shall work/serve/slave away, do all your production and practice all your craft.” How we understand labor and work influences how we understand rest. —J.A.S.

*m'lakhot*), from which all subsequent definitions of activities prohibited on Shabbat are derived.

The major categories of work prohibited on Shabbat include:

1. Carrying—This involves moving an object from one domain (*r'shut*) to another, most commonly, between private and public domains. We can carry things in our home, for example, but we may not carry them from our home into a public space. To circumvent this prohibition, communities can construct an *eruv*—a boundary that marks the circumference of a neighborhood—so that one can carry things or push a stroller or a wheelchair through the entire area as if it were a single domain.

Rather than “work,” many Jews understand *m'lakha* as meaning “productive labor” or “actions that change the world.” Obviously, it is less work to drive to shul than it is to walk, less work to push the “Up” button on the elevator than to trudge up seven flights of stairs. But if we understand *m'lakha* not as that which requires effort, but as that which changes the world, brings order out of chaos or yields a productive result, then these traditional prohibitions cohere more. —J.M.

It stands to reason that a functional, values-based approach to Shabbat practice is truer to the idea of Shabbat than a 2,000-year-old subjective list of prohibited categories of work (the 39 *m'lakhot*). —J.M.S.

I hold ever-shifting opinions about the legal fiction of the *eruv*. Some days, I think it is genius, an agreed-upon construction that enables a group of Jews to honor and preserve the law and yet function in a way that fosters ease and community-building. Other days, I think it is painfully artificial. Though I live in a community that has an *eruv*, it does not ordinarily shape my Shabbat practice, and it is not clear to me what causes the shift in my perspective. Such schizophrenia is, I suppose, what it means to be a postmodern Jew. —D.W.



2. Creating, Destroying and *Muktzeh* (Separated, set aside)—Making and destroying are forbidden on Shabbat, and we are not permitted to touch any object without an accepted use on Shabbat. Items that are set aside as *muktzeh* include money, writing implements and work tools.
3. *Sh'vut* (Resting)—Activities that are not in the spirit of Shabbat include discussing business matters or doing things that are not strictly directly forbidden on Shabbat but that involve preparations for Shabbat-prohibited activities we will do after Shabbat, such as packing a suitcase for travel or reading business correspondence or documents.

Many Orthodox people won't use an umbrella on Shabbat because opening an umbrella creates a shelter, and building on Shabbat is forbidden. Closing an umbrella eliminates the shelter, and destroying is also forbidden on Shabbat. —M.M.

The injunction to abstain from work on the Sabbath includes, for me, making sure my mind does not inadvertently pick up and spend time with angry feelings and hostile thoughts. Ruminating on negativity embitters the mind and disables its ability to celebrate or to bless. —S.B.

In earlier times, travel was work for the animal and the driver, who needed to make food along the way, jack up a cart that was stuck in a rut or deal with the wheel of a wagon if it came off. The driver would not have been allowed to fix the wheel on Shabbat, since that would be an act of creating. —M.M.

4. Traveling—The rabbis were concerned about the inadvertent damage one might cause to the environment in traveling with or on an animal. Such concerns are only magnified with contemporary modes of travel, such as the automobile.
5. Lighting a Fire—This prohibition has been interpreted to include turning on electricity. The original biblical injunction, “You shall not burn fire in all of your settlements,” (Exodus 35:3) was interpreted by the rabbis as a prohibition against kindling a fire on Shabbat, thus permitting the use of fire that was kindled prior to Shabbat. Similarly, the use of electricity is permitted as long as it was switched on before Shabbat or if an automatic timer set before Shabbat turns it on without any human agency.
6. Preparing Food—Cooking is prohibited; keeping food heated that has been prepared before Shabbat is permitted, as long as the flame or burner is not ignited or adjusted on Shabbat.

Starting a car engine involves igniting a spark, and the power of the engine comes from creating fires in its cylinders many times a minute. The debate about electricity is more complex because it involves no obvious consumption of fuel. When turning on the lights, am I igniting a spark or only opening a valve? While after considerable debate, Orthodox *poskim* (halakhic decisors or deciders) ruled against flipping an electric switch on Shabbat, the halakhic authority of the Conservative movement, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, permits it. —M.M./J.A.S.

Another legal fiction is that the non-Jew in question is turning on the electricity of his or her own volition (that is, not at the request of a halakhic Jew). —D.W.

For some who were raised in halakhically observant households and who are therefore familiar with the wide range and great abundance of these Shabbat restrictions, the overall effect of halakhic Shabbat observance remains positive and rich. Food is prepared, businesses are closed, shopping is completed, and travel ends before sundown on Friday. The activities in which one engages during Shabbat are limited and relaxing: walking, praying, eating, conversing, singing, reading and napping. There is no engagement with one's occupation or profession. There is nothing to accomplish, and one's awareness of the outside world is temporarily suspended (without access to phones, television, radio or the Internet). Shabbat that is observed in this way is indeed a day of rest and an opportunity to be physically and spiritually refreshed.

Most Jews today, however, have not been raised in such an environment. Despite this lack of familiarity with halakhic Shabbat observance, some people find it powerfully attractive to contemplate absolutely shutting down

When my partner and I decided to turn off all of our electronic screens over Shabbat, we had to make an extra effort to engage our children in fun activities, since we couldn't fall back on letting them watch TV or play a computer game. Many Jews raised in homes with a long list of Shabbat prohibitions do not experience the day as joyful or meaningful, but as a stringent set of "don'ts" that feel constricting and, especially to a child, boring. The challenge for anyone who wishes to create a meaningful Shabbat observance is shaping not only the "don'ts" that help construct the palace in time, but also the positive "dos" that make the day special and meaningful.

—T.S.

the workweek and entering into an uninterrupted, sanctified period of time. Abstaining from regular, habitual activities can be an effective way of freeing oneself from unwanted distractions, elevating one's perspective, and focusing contemplatively on what is truly important. The challenge one then confronts, of course, is that unless you are in an environment in which many are observing Shabbat in similar ways—a summer camp; a Jewish retreat center; some Israeli neighborhoods; *kibbutzim* and *moshavim*; and some sections of North American cities, such as New York City and Montreal—it is extremely dif-

Many of us live Jewish lives that are neither completely isolated nor completely immersed in a community that observes Shabbat traditionally, so one approach to Shabbat observance could be that the more immersed we are in a Shabbat community, the more we might aspire toward traditional observance, while the more isolated we are, the farther we may step away from traditional observance to experience the pleasure of Shabbat. —J.G.K.

There are other reasons *not* to observe Shabbat in the traditional/Orthodox way. Our historical understanding lets us know that the Torah itself actually records multiple understandings of the meaning and import of Shabbat, not all of which have been encoded in rabbinic Shabbat practice. Our practice should reflect our encounter with tradition in all its variety, and also our own understanding of the nature of Shabbat. —J.A.S.

difficult to observe all of the traditional Shabbat prohibitions and simultaneously to experience the joy and pleasure of Shabbat celebration.

For those outside of such Shabbat-friendly environments, Shabbat observance requires an ongoing series of decisions concerning which activities promote a positive sense of rest and renewal and which do not. Individuals will reach different conclusions, and they may find that their decisions vary over time and in different contexts. Sometimes, these decisions may lead someone to consider

The criteria by which a progressive Jew or a progressive Jewish community will define their Shabbat observance are always subject to reconsideration. Promoting a positive sense of rest and renewal and fostering the spirit of Shabbat are two good, broad criteria, but they are not the only ones, and they may not be sufficient by themselves. Here are some other possible criteria: What will promote connection to sacred community, Jewish tradition, Jewish learning and/or Jewish time? What will engage me/us in spiritual practice/connection with God? Spiritual practice can be quite rigorous and disciplined, not necessarily “restful” per se. What is it about traditional observance—its spirit, values and forms, and what it potentially cultivates inwardly, interpersonally, communally and outwardly/socially/culturally—that can be revalued? —M.M.

When our children were younger, we introduced them to the concept of the Shabbat exception. On occasion we would do things on a specific Shabbat that as a rule we would not do on Shabbat. Sometimes that would mean driving several hours on Shabbat afternoon to get to a vacation destination rather than waiting until early Sunday morning so as to have an extra day away together. Sometimes it would mean watching something on television on Friday night, a time when we normally would not turn on the set. Or it could mean delaying Friday night candle lighting, Kiddush and dinner until our son got home from one of his theater performances at 11 P.M. In naming such things “Shabbat exceptions,” we were, paradoxically, reinforcing the sanctity of Shabbat and affirming the norms of our usual family Shabbat rhythm. —R.H.

traditionally prohibited activities as permissible, while considering traditionally permitted activities as prohibited. Should we restrict the use of the phone to topics appropriate to Shabbat, while not making or taking calls related to work, or should we give up phone use altogether? Should we not watch television at all, even if it has been set by a timer, because its programming is disruptive to the spirit of Shabbat? Should we watch a movie, carefully selected for its Shabbat spirit, on a DVD player? Does a family trip to the zoo or the museum on Shabbat afternoon preserve the spirit of Shabbat (but only if we are members, so that we don't have to pay for admission, and only if we bring snacks rather than buy them? Or can we be selective about when we do and don't handle money or

My own idiosyncratic practice, which perhaps makes sense only in New England, is that I don't watch TV on Shabbat, with the exception of Red Sox games (with the "mute" turned on during the commercials). —T.S.

It takes attention and intention to be *shomeret Shabbat* outside of halakhic structures. I find looking at art deeply nourishing, and since I have little free time, I may choose to pay for admission to the art museum on Shabbat afternoon. However, once I have my wallet out and I am in an environment with others who are simply having a lovely Saturday, not a holy Shabbat, I need to remind myself not to enter the gift shop or purchase a museum membership. I relish the challenge, but it is a challenge nonetheless. —D.W.

I view money as part of the world of instrumental "I-It" relationships, not appropriate to the "I-Thou" covenantal relationships of Shabbat. We should also consider that when we use money, someone else is being required to work for us on the weekend, perhaps out of economic necessity and not fully out of free will. —J.A.S.

For much of the last century, it has been downright patriotic to shop. America has become a nation of citizen-consumers. Refraining from shopping is radically countercultural. —D.W.

credit cards—perhaps not using money for weekday concerns (such as shopping), but using it for activities that we deem in keeping with the spirit of Shabbat (such as recreation)?

In all of these many decisions, the positive objective of the *shomer/et Shabbat* is to live with a sense of sanctified time, in which we experience the rest and renewal of Shabbat that comes with moving more slowly, putting our cares aside, and devoting ourselves to a spiritual practice and awareness that may be neglected during the work-week. In pursuit of creating that positive sense of holiness, many people who do not choose to abide by halakhic Shabbat prohibitions nevertheless find it meaningful to abstain from activities that have work-like connotations for them. Here are just a few examples to consider:

A suggestion I often make to people whose jobs require them to work on Shabbat (especially healthcare professionals) is to incorporate a Shabbat-like practice into their workday: Light candles when you get home; pack a special lunch that you have only on Shabbat; or keep a beautiful plate or glassware on the job that you use only on Shabbat. This way, you can create small openings of *oneg Shabbat* in your otherwise work-focused day. —N.H.M.

Our congregation's ritual committee compared the usefulness of adopting local communal rules of Shabbat practice to the usefulness of rules in games or the rules of writing a haiku. These are structures that promote communal activity, challenge us to excel, and help create meaning. —J.A.S.

As we spend more and more of our time wired, wireless and otherwise tethered to the online world, Shabbat is a time to unplug. At the very least, it's a great excuse to temporarily withdraw from the insane notion that one must immediately reply to all texts, emails and phone calls. More than that, however, logging off for a day returns the virtual to its proper place and offers us a powerful reiteration of the real. —J.M.

1. Reading, Listening to, or Viewing the News—If you find the prospect of missing 25 hours of the perpetual news cycle startling or even unimaginable, you may want to give it a try. What would it be like to cut yourself off from your globalized interconnections and to devote yourself to mindful attention to your inner life and to the people with whom you are personally connected?
2. Planning for the Future—This may involve ruminating about a career change or a potential investment, rehearsing a conversation you want to have with a family member or work associate, or planning an outing or get-together with friends or family after Shabbat. Perhaps, if the only way to let go of a train of thought is to jot down a brief note—and you write on Shabbat—you might try writing it down so that you can return to awareness of the present.

Many Jews who choose to avoid accessing the news, current events, politics and related issues on Shabbat often find the peace and tranquility they try to create disrupted by sermons, *divrey Torah* and synagogue dialogues that address exactly (and often stridently as well as polemically) the issues of daily life that they have tried to avoid on Shabbat. —R.H.

As a Jewish communal professional, I sometimes find little time during my work week to pay attention to the world around me, and I think that Shabbat might be the best time for me to reconnect with the rest of humanity. —J.G.K.

Be careful not to let jotting down a few notes explode into having Shabbat be the time to work on your to-do lists! —J.A.S.



3. Engaging in Self-Criticism—Imagine living one day each week satisfied with what you have done over the previous six days as good enough, in imitation of the God of Genesis who is said to have “rested and been renewed” (*shavat vayinafash*) on the seventh day after creating a world that is good. We can resume our efforts to improve ourselves and the world after dark on Saturday evening. The created world from which God stepped back was and is certainly not perfect.
4. Hurrying and Multitasking—This may be the most difficult challenge of all. Paradoxically, we often find ourselves rushing on Shabbat—preparing for and serving guests and cleaning up after them, getting family members ready to go to synagogue, and so on. The day of rest is best lived with a restful, focused consciousness.

On this day, we ask God to take pleasure in our rest—to accept us the way we are, not because we are doing anything, but just because of our being us in a state of rest. We can also practice that same self-compassion. —J.A.S.

Perhaps the greatest gift of Shabbat is the opportunity to accept ourselves for who we are. As God looked at what God had created and said, “This is very good,” we should look in our own mirrors each week and, with all our imperfections and weaknesses, say of ourselves, “This is very good” as well. Self-acceptance can be a sacred act that aligns us with the very same Torah idea that we are created in the divine image and sacred just as we are. —S.C.R.

Commitment to the principle of not rushing on Shabbat might also include not undertaking long-distance travel on Shabbat. The hustle and bustle of waiting for trains, planes or buses, accompanied by the exhaustion we can feel during long trips, can diminish the sense of calm that these 25 hours afford us. —B.P.

5. Shopping—This may include refraining not only from buying things in stores or online, but also from window shopping, visiting websites to see what’s available, and discussing best brands or best buys—anything that coaxes us into the role of consumer.

These five categories are intended to be suggestive sparks to encourage you to consider activities from which you may want to abstain so that your Shabbat can be more mindful and holy.

### *Consistency of Practice*

One of the obstacles that many people confront in thinking of themselves as Shabbat observers is the notion that Shabbat observance must be consistent. You may catch

In shaping one’s own Shabbat practice, it is important not merely to choose activities that we already deem relaxing or enjoyable. Shabbat observance is a spiritual practice, and any practice involves some element of challenge and discipline. There is an element of discernment in figuring out what is true “rest,” in a Shabbat sense, and what is merely a form of entertainment that we use to distract ourselves during the course of a regular day. Surfing the Web might be relaxing to some, but I would argue that it is not a Shabbat practice; neither is going to the mall or playing video games. There is something profoundly countercultural in the ways in which Shabbat invites us to slow down the pace of our lives, which are now geared to the speed of computers counted in nanoseconds, and to simplify our day, over against the constant onslaught of input from cyberspace and the incessant calls to consume from the surrounding culture. —T.S.

I encourage people to ask questions: Is there something I want to make sure to do once a week? Is there something I wish I didn’t have to do for at least one day each week?” The answers to these questions are often, though not always, things to do and not do on Shabbat. —J.A.S.

yourself thinking: “If I decide that I will not cook on Shabbat, what will happen when a week arrives in which I am simply not able to have everything prepared before Friday sundown?” Or: “I can commit to eating cold cereal on Shabbat mornings, but I’m not willing to refuse to cook eggs or oatmeal for my partner or children, so I guess that I’m not prepared to be a *shomer/et Shabbat*.”

In the context of the Orthodox community, the term “*shomer Shabbat*” entails consistency, as explained above. If you are consistent and reliable in your observance of Shabbat, then you are assumed to be reliable in all other matters of halakhic practice. In that universe, intentionally violating a Shabbat prohibition creates a serious ethical dilemma because hiding the violation misleads others into assuming that you are trustworthy in all matters of halakhic practice—that they can trust, for example, the kashrut of your kitchen.

In Orthodox practice, the halakhic observance of Shabbat is understood as God’s will, so it is not perceived to be the place of human beings to choose some practices and not others. Consistency entails bringing one’s will into consistent alignment with God’s will. There may be some element at work of how it looks to others, but the primary factor is to accept mitzvot as a total system. No individual mitzvah has more value or meaning than another. —M.M.

Some *haredi* (strict Orthodox) authorities differentiate between ramifications of private violations of Jewish laws and public, willful violations of them for the purpose of making such decisions as whom to trust in matters of *kashrut*, for instance. —J.G.K.

Consistency of practice is an issue of a lifetime, not only of the moment. While some Jews take on a certain pattern of Shabbat observance and maintain it for decades or even a lifetime, others find that as they change and grow, the ways in which they approach and engage Shabbat change and grow as well. I once knew a rabbi who did not travel by car on Shabbat. Upon retirement from his congregation, he moved to a home that was too far from any synagogue to walk and changed his practice. —R.H.

In the rest of the Jewish world, however, there is no absolute virtue in consistency of practice. To be sure, consistency in ritual and spiritual practice, like any other kind of practice, has many benefits. Sanctity accrues to a given behavior as our cumulative associations reappear each week. The more we observe or recite them, the more rituals and prayers serve a mnemonic function, sparking in us reminders of the values, insights and experiences that we associate with them. There are certainly advantages to regularizing our Shabbat observance rather than deciding over and over again how to observe Shabbat each week.

There are many reasons, however, why you may choose to perform a particular Shabbat practice—or to refrain from doing a particular activity on Shabbat—on some occasions but not on others. Here is a sampling of such reasons:

One of the benefits of consistency of practice is that it encourages us to move beyond self-focus to a focus on the other. It reminds us that our lives are not lived only for our own convenience; we are obligated/commanded by the presence of the Other/other.  
—J.A.S.

My most consistent Shabbat practice over the past 20 years has been to refrain from shaving. Here, traditional definitions and my personal sense of labor coincide.  
—J.G.K.

I prefer an approach to Shabbat practice that grows out of a basic principle/value understanding of the day. A standard-seeking understanding of Shabbat leads to a practice close to the traditional rabbinic practice. An in-the-moment understanding leads to my community's practice. A social-justice understanding probably emphasizes an avoidance of commerce and maybe even forbids hiring a rabbi on Shabbat!  
—J.A.S.

- You may be experimenting with unfamiliar observances. You may decide to walk to synagogue for a few weeks and then find that walking there in the rain or in subfreezing weather diminishes rather than enhances your Shabbat practice, so you decide to ride to synagogue when the weather is uninviting.
- Relative to any given mitzvah, you may be in a state of what the German philosopher Franz Rosenzweig called “not yet.” You remain open to practices that have never been yours until now, but you are not yet prepared to undertake them. Remaining open, you try them but experience discomfort. So it takes a while before you are moved to try again.
- You may find that different contexts require different approaches to Shabbat observance. In your home, you observe Shabbat in one way; perhaps you don’t listen to the radio, for example. But when you are visiting your family or friends who do listen to the radio, it may be impractical and/or unappealing to ask them to change their behavior to accommodate you. You may not want your ritual observance to cause you to distance yourself from them.

Families that choose to send children to Jewish day school through middle school often find themselves renegotiating Shabbat observance once these children enter public high school. Open discussion as to how to preserve a spirit of Shabbat while not isolating students from their peers and peer activities is an important part of helping emerging adults to take on the process of decision making about Shabbat.

—R.H.

Or, you may be committed to participating in a political demonstration that occurs on Shabbat, though participation will require that you do things that you don't usually do on Shabbat.

- You may be committed, on principle, to inconsistency. You may love the value of ritual observance in your life, but not want to elevate it above all other things in a way that could become idolatrous. You don't want to forget that you are choosing to perform a given mitzvah, that it was not commanded by God at Mount Sinai for all time. You may not want to be enslaved to ritual practice in a way that keeps you from acting according to your values when they conflict with a given ritual proscription. So perhaps you decide, for example, that any Shabbat ritual practice that you observe will be kept for a maximum of 51 times each year, or that your Shabbat practice can and ought to be modified if it has negative consequences in a given circumstance—for example, if it would cause another person pain or embarrassment.

Consistency also enables us to experience impact over time. Shabbat observances are so markedly countercultural that it takes time to get used to various restrictions and limitations so that they become normative. We can then cultivate within us the awareness, orientation, and states of mind and heart they have the potential to generate. I think there is value to exploring what it is like to place personal will and desire second to larger shared norms, to experiencing surrender in a way that doesn't constantly put my own likes and dislikes at the center of what I do. This is a challenging perspective to discuss in the context of progressive Jewish practice, but I think it addresses one of the weaknesses of a "choose-your-own-Judaism" approach. This leads me to ask when I should decide to set aside choice and what might arise from that.

—M.M.

For any of these reasons and many others, we can take on observances of Shabbat without being sure if we are ready to commit to doing them forever. And there is no reason to be self-critical about the lack of such commitment to consistency. You are not necessarily a better or a worse Jew or human being because you are not thoroughly consistent. To the contrary, by this *Guide*'s definition, a *shomer/et Shabbat* is "someone who sets Shabbat aside as a special day and is in the perpetual, lifelong process of discovering how the *kedusha* (sanctity) and *menuḥa* (rest) of Shabbat can best be experienced." The observance of Shabbat entails change, growth and flexibility. It is a perpetual, lifelong process.

Experimentation can be an important element to a dynamic and rich Jewish life. Give yourself permission to be creative with your Shabbat practice and then reflect on how that difference enhances or detracts from your Shabbat experience. —J.M.S.

Becoming comfortable with being inconsistent is a necessary developmental step for liberal Jews. As Walt Whitman says in "Song of Myself," "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes.)" —H.S.V.

In our family, the choices of Shabbat observance are an evolving practice. We currently refrain from watching TV and movies, but we do play music (in the car) that honors the spirit of Shabbat. It's hard to know at this moment what our practice will look like ten years from now. —N.C.M.

Many progressive Jews are uncomfortable with imposing a greater degree of traditional observance on another Jew by, for example, asking someone to turn off music. It is easier to make demands if you believe that you are following the one right way to do things, but progressive Jews can be just as committed in their practice, and they are just as deserving of accommodation. Progressive Jewish communities struggle with commitment to being consistent, and I think their members are very ready to make exceptions in order to avoid conflict or to avoid standing out. The greater challenge is in trying to stick with patterns of observance that no one else is going to hold you to but yourself. —M.M.

Having said all that, it is important also to note the advantages and benefits of consistency. We all know what it is like to ask the questions, “What shall I do on Sunday?” or “What shall I do on my day off?” Faced with “free time,” we choose among a myriad of options: catching up on sleep, running errands, watching a ball game, visiting with family or friends, reading a novel, playing golf and so on. Days off are wonderful, but they are not Shabbat.

What distinguishes Shabbat from days off is the sanctity we invest in it. Sanctity accrues to regular rituals and activities that one associates with values and feelings, which then trigger the rich, complex and multivalent experience of Shabbat. The lighting of Shabbat candles on Friday evening may be the most widely practiced of such moments. To the extent that one has many such regular ways of observing Shabbat—reciting Kiddush over wine, eating leisurely meals, singing, attending Shabbat services at synagogue and celebrating *Havdala*—one is able to enter the alternate Shabbat reality more seamlessly, without having to generate it each week. One can do this even if one’s Shabbat observance practice varies occasionally or week to week.



## *Living in a Multicultural World*

Many of us live in heterogeneous communities. Many members of our nuclear families, our families of origin, our close friends and our social and business acquaintances do not observe Shabbat the way we do, if they observe it at all. In fact, many of them are not Jewish.

Halakhic Shabbat observance can have the effect of separating Jews from non-Jews, and observant Jews from non-observant Jews. A great deal happens in the larger society on Friday evenings and Saturdays in which a halakhic Shabbat observer does not participate. Many of us today may not want our Jewish lives to separate us from others. We may not want to prevent our children from playing in Little League games, for example, or from participating in recitals that are scheduled on Shabbat. We

When we lived and studied in Israel, my wife and I would occasionally designate an upcoming Shabbat as a “*Shabbat hiloni*,” a secular Shabbat. By this, we meant that we would experience Shabbat in the way that *hiloni* Israelis do: with picnics in the park or trips to the beach. When we returned to the United States, we continued this practice. —H.S.V.

While halakhic observance of Shabbat may have the effect of separating Jews from non-Jews, that is certainly not among its major purposes. —J.A.S.

Being different is one of the things that marks a Jew in a non-Jewish society and often allows the person to resist other demands of the society. I still remember one of my sons saying to me, as a teenager, that he didn’t smoke, didn’t drink, and kept kosher—what more could I want? “Do your homework,” I replied. But his point was well taken: One form of difference supports other forms of difference. —D.D.M.

may welcome non-Jews and nonpracticing Jews to our homes for Shabbat and holidays, not because we aspire to convince them to be like us, but because we enjoy their company. This enhances our experience of Shabbat, and we may find it necessary to modify our practices in order to make our guests feel comfortable. When they celebrate events (including *b'ney mitzvah* services and celebrations) in their lives on Shabbat, we may not want to miss celebrating with them just because it would involve activities we normally abstain from on Shabbat.

We perpetually balance conflicting values. The importance of regular Shabbat practice does not always supersede all other considerations. Being a *shomer/et Shabbat* requires ongoing decision making of some complexity.

My parents and I often spent Shabbat afternoons during my childhood visiting the home of my father's lifelong friend, Ira, and his family. We parked our car several blocks from their apartment in order to respect the religious sentiments of Ira's Orthodox neighborhood. We sat, parents and children, in the living room, talking and laughing, and waited until the room was quite dark and, in winter, quite cool, before Ira said *Havdala*. Then we had light and heat and hot tea. Notwithstanding any challenge I might have experienced, I was always content and happy there. I think it was the love that my father and Ira had for each other, a love that I knew transcended their diverging beliefs and practices, that warmed the room and made it feel holy. —S.B.

Not engaging in observances that cause pain or embarrassment to someone else or that keep you from acting on your values may mean that you cannot always observe in exactly the same way. That is an ethical calculation regarding conflicting commitments. Wanting not to make observance idolatrous does not seem like a significant issue for non-halakhic Jews. More relevant perhaps is ensuring that observance holds both *keva* (structure) and *kavana* (intentionality), holding a fruitful tension among regularity, consistency, discipline, commitment and meaningful aliveness. When *kavana* flags, it may be time to alter observance, at least temporarily. —M.M.

## *Pluralism*

Because the full observance of Shabbat assumes interacting with other people and participating in community for meals and services, Shabbat is one of the primary ritual locations (along with kashrut observance) in which we confront the ways that our practice differs from the practice of friends and neighbors. Given these issues, it is important to consider observance alongside the value of *klal Yisrael*, the unity and diversity of the Jewish people. What can we do to avoid or transcend tensions and insults that may be sparked inadvertently when people who have diverse practices encounter one another?

First, in a pluralistic community, we don't assume homogeneous practice, and we are not offended by its absence. Your child's best friend may be permitted to go on a class trip that occurs on Saturday, and your child may wonder why she is not allowed to participate as well.

Just the notion that our Shabbat choices involve practices and not mythic imperatives is crucial. A practice is something undertaken for its effects. With *kavana*, the mind is inclined toward whatever subtle transformations may transpire. Choices about these various behaviors are pragmatic, and they will be at least slightly different for each of us. This is not some wishy-washy compromise; it's an affirmation of our integrity and authenticity as human beings. —J.M.

A Hillel setting is often the first place where people encounter very different Shabbat experiences. This encounter can be jarring, alienating and frustrating, or eye-opening, cathartic and growthful, depending on one's background and approach. The main key to having a positive experience is to respect one another's humanity and Judaism. —J.M.S.

The pluralistic answer is not necessarily that you are Shabbat observers and the other family is not. They may observe Shabbat in a different way. Or they may be Jews who are secular and not observant of religious rituals. Or they may not be Jewish. Such situations are opportunities to affirm your household's commitment to Shabbat while acknowledging and affirming that different people have varying beliefs and practices. Conversely, if your dinner guest does not participate in candle lighting before you sit down to dinner because he has already lit candles at home before sunset, the pluralistic response is to respect his variant practice without taking offense. The operating expectation is that we are all different, and that this is a good thing.

Second, being clear with others about one's own needs and practice is always helpful. "I know that you don't ride on Shabbat. Is it okay with you if I drive to and from your house for Shabbat dinner? Is it okay if I bring dessert when I drive over, even though it will already be dark?" "It is not our practice to turn on lights on Shabbat, so

For a novice, the idea of sharing Shabbat can sound very complicated. It does not need to be. Most Jews who care about Shabbat would be very happy to receive an invitation to share Shabbat with others. Members of liberal communities, including rabbis, are highly unlikely to be offended by the host's Shabbat practice. —J.A.S.

Asking some Orthodox people whether it is okay to drive over for Shabbat dinner could be a little tricky since they believe that the *halakha* requires them to say no because you asked. If you don't ask and simply arrive, then it is totally your decision and responsibility. If they are asked, they share the responsibility for your violation of *halakha*. —M.M.

please try to remember not to switch them off.” The more we know about one another’s practices, the more we can be mutually respectful.

Third, we often make the implicit assumption that more ritual observance is better. “There is so much to learn,” we say effusively, “so many opportunities to enrich our lives by increasing our observance of Shabbat!” This assumption elevates one person’s level of practice over another. It may be, for example, that you only recite the blessing over the wine before the meal on Friday evening and do not recite the full Kiddush prayer because that’s what your grandfather did, and you honor his memory by following his practice. It would not necessarily be an “upgrade” of your Jewish life to chant the full Kiddush. More is not always better.

Fourth, there is a halakhic category called “a fence around the Torah” (*siyag latorah*) that prohibits activities on Shabbat not because they are forbidden in themselves, but because engaging in them might lead us inadvertently to do something else that is prohibited. Halakhically, we are not permitted to play the guitar, for example, because a string might break, and we might then forget that it is Shabbat and try to replace it. Playing would be permitted, hypothetically, but since repairing is prohibited, playing is prohibited as well because of where it might lead.

Since playing guitar is one of my greatest joys, I engage in it almost every Shabbat whether a string might break or not, since the joy of playing (and writing music as well) is its own reward. My personal observance includes replacing strings if they break so that the joy of playing can continue. —S.C.R.

There is something in the halakhic practice of creating a fence around the Torah that the nonhalakhic *shomer/et Shabbat* may find helpful. Which recreational activities are and are not likely to allow you to maintain your sense of Shabbat? Cycling in the park may help to bring you to a desirable relaxed or contemplative state; you ride, you return home, and you don't encounter another world. You may choose to refrain from embarking on a challenging climb up an unfamiliar mountain trail, not because hiking is less conducive to creating a Shabbat state of mind than cycling, but because it may lead to stress, or to the need to problem-solve. You may conclude that playing basketball with one group of people is a Shabbat activity, while playing with another group is not, perhaps because of the aggressiveness of the game, or because one group generally goes out for a beer afterward, and it would be difficult for you not to join them.

The point is that decision making for a nonhalakhic *shomer/et Shabbat* can be subtle and complicated—far more so than for someone with a halakhic practice who follows the rulings of halakhic *poskim* (experts). Achieving a balance between Shabbat observance and participation in the greater world requires ongoing thought, and sometimes creating a behavioral fence around us may be essential.

Fifth, the halakhic principle of *pikuah nefesh* (saving a life) always applies on Shabbat. Any prohibited activity

Disconnecting from our electronic devices can be seen as a “fence” for non-halakhic Jews. While the Internet can be a source of pleasure, it has the potential to lead us back into the weekday modes of multitasking, engaging in business or generally taking us away from the uniqueness of sacred time. —B.P.

becomes permitted if it is in the service of saving a life or getting needed treatment to a person who is ill. The non-halakhic *shomer/et Shabbat* may find an expanded version of this principle helpful in formulating his or her own practice. Is your observance of Shabbat undermining your physical and/or emotional health? Is your practice doing damage to others? If the answer to either of these questions is “yes,” you may conclude that you ought to modify your behavior on Shabbat.

## *Nontraditional Shabbat Practice*

Not everyone finds that attending synagogue services is always the best way to usher in and celebrate Shabbat. For those who prefer to celebrate at home alone or with family and/or friends, or to go to others' homes, a previous section describes Shabbat home observance on Friday evening. Others, however, may not find the practice of prayer and communal worship to be meaningful, and they may not be able to create meaningful observance of Shabbat at home. Yet they may be very interested in maintaining an observance of Shabbat. Those who fit this description face the challenge of being a *shomer/et Shabbat* (Sabbath observer) without clear guidance from inherited Jewish traditions.

Some of the general issues raised by this challenge are addressed above in the section, "A New Definition of



*Shomer Shabbat.*” The current section is more specific, naming some of the possibilities in order to accord them weight and respect. They are not inferior to the choice of attending synagogue services on Shabbat and spending the better part of the evening and afternoon singing around a Shabbat table. Judaism is a civilization, not only a religion; Shabbat can be a significant practice in your life even if you do not think of yourself as particularly religious or spiritual. Each of us answers the questions of practice in our own way. What are some of the possibilities for a serious, meaningful, nontraditional Shabbat observance?

First, it should be noted that there may be pieces of traditional practice that resonate for some people, evoking treasured experiences and associations and bringing thoughts and memories of loved ones to life. Lighting Shabbat candles is one example. Even if you do not engage in any other traditional Shabbat activity on a given Shabbat, you may find that lighting the candles is the concrete marker that brings you into a different realm of consciousness. Or that marker could involve eating hallah, or calling your grandmother, or timing your arrival at synagogue so that you miss the service but participate in the social time of the *oneg*.

Second, many people find that engaging in an activity on Shabbat that they also engage in on weekdays can be a substantially different experience, just because they do it in the spirit of Shabbat—breathing more deeply and eating more slowly and mindfully. You might luxuriate in reading the newspaper because you enjoy it, rather than skimming through it for information before hurrying off

to work or school. You might enjoy the company of family and friends, without having to accomplish anything. It may be helpful to think of Shabbat observance as much more than doing specific, Shabbat-related things such as reciting the Kiddush over wine or attending synagogue services. Even if you don't engage in any traditional practices, you can still designate Shabbat as a day when you relate to the world in a totally different way, with an awareness of your ultimate values.

It is useful to determine the goals that you seek to achieve in your observance of Shabbat. Here are some suggestions:

- *No Work*—If the way you want to align with the sabbatical rhythm of the seven-day week is to do absolutely nothing related to your profession or

How should you decide whether a traditionally prohibited creative activity, such as gardening, painting or knitting, might contribute to your contemporary, liberal Shabbat? One useful consideration is whether you are engaging in the activity for the sake of the process or for a product. One view of Shabbat is that it is a day for enjoying the process of living, not for production. —J.A.S.

There is a difference between needing rest and needing recharging. While we often have the need to rest physically, we also may feel depleted emotionally, intellectually, sexually or spiritually. So while going away for a retreat-style Shabbat weekend might charge us up spiritually and intellectually, the drive home afterward might also leave us physically exhausted. Awareness of each of the five realms of our energy provides not only a key to avoiding fatigue during the week, but may create the possibility of a deeper level of replenishment on Shabbat. —J.G.K.

Choosing an activity in which we specifically do not engage on Shabbat also echoes another piece of tradition, even if the activity we choose is not one of the 39 traditional categories of work prohibited on Shabbat. —J.G.K.

business, then your practice may consist of not taking calls or checking electronic messages or reading the business section of the news. The measure of your success may be whether you avoid planning on Shabbat for what you need to do once Shabbat is over. If you feel as if your life is consumed by your work, a Shabbat practice offers the opportunity to reconnect each week for an extended period (25 hours!) with the rest of your values, interests and priorities.

- *Focus on Nature*—For some people, Shabbat, the celebration of the creation of the world, is the time to connect with the natural world by hiking in the woods or gardening. If your life is structured in such a way that you find yourself generally unaware of or unable to appreciate the natural beauty that surrounds you, this may be a path that works for you. The traditional Shabbat prohibitions of planting and weeding, for example, were first established when most of our ancestors lived agrarian lives. These were prohibitions of engaging in what you did for work. Unless you are a farmer, these prohibitions may function to undermine your Shabbat rest.

When we observe a full-length Shabbat from before sunset Friday until Saturday's nightfall, we remind ourselves that something is bigger than us, and that we do not and cannot control everything.

—J.G.K.

- *Family*—For parents who spend too little time with their children during the week or partners who find it helpful to have a designated period of time to spend together, Shabbat offers a regular designated time to focus on these priorities. It is not always easy to do, but establishing Shabbat dinner on Friday night as a time when you are reliably at the table for candle lighting can be transformative in a family's or relationship's dynamics. Similarly, going regularly to synagogue services together, whether or not the services themselves always speak to you, can have this effect, as can other regularly designated shared times on Shabbat morning and afternoon. Or Shabbat may be the day when you travel to see grandparents or grandchildren, older and less mobile aunts or uncles, or siblings or cousins whom you miss. You may find that when such visits come to be associated subliminally with Shabbat, they acquire an additional sense of sanctity and purpose.

I learned from beloved friends the nontraditional practice of bringing a phone to the Shabbat table. They would call an elderly parent who lived far away and was otherwise isolated on Shabbat, so that they could share in the moments of making Kid-dush and blessing the hallah and exchange Shabbat greetings and blessings between the generations. That parent has passed on now. However, the memories of those precious moments linger and inspire the act at my own Shabbat table until this day.

—M.K.

Ideally, it may be better to travel long distances before Shabbat, but if it is not logistically possible to do this, you may decide that the unpleasantness of traveling on Shabbat is outweighed by the value of the visit and the Shabbat spirit that it generates.

- *Friends*—Most of us are not able to spend as much time with friends as we would prefer because of work demands, family responsibilities and the hectic nature of our lives. For many people, time spent with people we choose to see is a lived experience of the divine. In fact, the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber asserted that it is precisely in a dialogical relationship between two people that God's presence is most manifest. On Shabbat we can seek out people with whom we are at ease. These may be people with whom we have fun, feel safe and let our guard down, people who perhaps share long histories with us or who may be new to our lives, offering the excitement that accompanies the building of a new relationship. Shabbat is ideally the time when we receive a second soul; God's presence, the *Shekhina*, is often identified with the Shabbat Bride. Some may indeed find time spent with good friends to be the best way to celebrate Shabbat.

- *Leaving the Web Behind*—In traditional settings, Shabbat-observant Jews go beyond not walking into a store to make a purchase; they do their best to avoid a business district in which others are engaged in weekday commerce. Some find that switching off access to the Internet serves an equivalent function. Far more than the shops and people on Main Street,

How to practice leaving behind the Web when smartphones enable us to carry the Web in our pockets and tallit bags? If you deem it necessary to carry a phone and keep it on in case of emergency, you might decide to turn off the Web/email part of the phone. The act of disabling part of the phone sets the distinction between Shabbat and the rest of the week and can help allow the mind to relax and break out of patterned actions of habitually grabbing for the phone to text, email, check the calendar, surf the Web, and also receive and make calls. —M.K.

The discussion of prohibited and permitted activities on Shabbat inevitably draws us into the ancient debate about the letter of the law vs. the spirit of the law. While this can be helpful by way of organizing conversations, we should understand that the argument about letter vs. spirit is not simply about opposing positions. They are actually two ends of a continuum along which we move when making decisions about Jewish behaviors. Consider the use of technology on Shabbat. Jews who choose to be governed by *halakha* will not use liturgy apps on a smartphone or a tablet reader. The reasons given for avoidance vary, some being based on the prohibition against manipulating electricity (“fire”) on Shabbat, others on prohibitions against inscribing/writing/copying on Shabbat since every keystroke is entered somewhere. These reasons follow the letter of the law. Still others suggest that in light of the siege of connectivity under which we increasingly labor, we need a Shabbat from technology simply to re-engage in unmediated human-to-human contact. This is a spirit-of-the-law position. Increasingly sophisticated and ubiquitous versions of Jewish liturgy (as well as text, commentary and story) are available online, and increasing numbers of Jews, certainly those under a certain age, see those resources as things that could enrich their Shabbat experience by using the devices they have come to rely on for daily access to information. For these Jews, bringing a device to Shabbat services that allows them to follow on an e-reader the same siddur being held by their neighbor is a preferred way of engaging the text. The determination of what is prohibited and permitted on Shabbat is likely to be a much more personal determination in the future. —R.H.

the Web draws us in. It is virtually impossible to do anything on the Web without links and pop-ups that take us elsewhere. It is a virtual world that never sleeps; it is always not Shabbat somewhere.

- *Acts of Tikun Olam (Improving the World)*—One of the central and repeating Shabbat themes is that it commemorates the Exodus from Egyptian slavery (*zekher litzi'at Mitzrayim*). The ability to refrain from engaging in our everyday occupations is a consequence of our having been liberated from slavery; we don't have to work all of the time. Thus, some people find that engaging in activities that help others fulfill their needs, such as attending a demonstration or lobbying government officials, is an ideal way to concretize and embody a commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt in the spirit of Shabbat.
- *Acts of G'milut Hessed (Deeds of Loving Kindness)*—Some find that helping out less fortunate people—visiting sick people (*bikur ḥolim*) or shut-ins, serving as a big brother or big sister, serving as a reading or math tutor—is a way of being part of

I view Shabbat as a day to rest from building and repairing, a day for appreciating the world as it is. Even liberal rabbinic authorities have tended to discourage work-like *tiḳun olam* on Shabbat, such as building a house with Habitat for Humanity or conducting a soup kitchen fundraiser, which might be done on a day other than Shabbat. Of course, the principle of *pikuah nefesh* – that saving a life overrides the prohibitions of Shabbat – might sometimes justify *tiḳun olam* efforts if there is a reason they need to take place on Shabbat. We all look forward to a time when our weekday work activities are all acts of *tiḳun olam* and Shabbat takes place in a world that is already *m'tuḳan* – already repaired. —J.A.S.

*am m'kad'shey sh'vi'i*, a people that makes the seventh day holy. If the rest of your week does not include such service work, doing it on Shabbat may create a clear distinction for you between the sacred and the everyday.

- *Working Out*—Swimming, jogging, hiking, playing in a weekly basketball game, practicing yoga, lifting weights: For some of us, such activities are a contemplative practice, a spiritual experience in which our consciousness slows down and expands, a way to get out of our minds and to be fully present in our bodies. Physical activities are one of the ways that we “pray.” As such, they can be central to the celebration of Shabbat.
- *Play*—This is a broad category. Play is not explicitly in the traditional repertoire of Shabbat activities, in part because of rabbinic Judaism’s historic aversion

More and more Jewish communities have begun to offer Jewish yoga sessions on Shabbat morning in synagogues. A common occurrence is to practice yoga in the early part of the morning at shul, and then to join the community during the larger service afterward. In such cases, yoga is offered as an embodied Jewish spiritual practice, a way of praying with our bodies in the context of Jewishly themed yoga sessions. This practice offers nourishment and stretch for body and soul, creating a communal expression of integrated prayer experience in the company of a nontraditional kind of minyan. Yoga practice can help some people find deep rest, and by practicing yoga on Shabbat, they find their experience of the day of rest greatly enhanced and deepened. —M.K.

The physical and the spiritual can be one and the same. This is reflected by the prayer book citing Psalms 35:10: “*Kol atzmotay tomarna Adonay mi khamokha*”—“Let all my bones say, ‘God, who is like you?’” —J.G.K.



to wasting time and its focus on devoting oneself to God at every moment. But many of us live pressure-filled lives that are largely oriented to accomplishing specific goals, both professionally and personally. As we noted at the outset, Shabbat is the perfect time to play, to do things we enjoy without worrying about what we are accomplishing. For some of us, it may be the best way to get off life's treadmill and experience the *menuḥa* of Shabbat.

- *Reading*—Those of us for whom reading is a pleasure know what nourishes our souls—fiction, poetry, history, memoirs, contemplative practice, Jewish or other religious teachings or page-turning murder mysteries. It is important to define your goals for Shabbat reading—the acquisition of new knowledge or insight, reading authors or genres for which you have no time in the remainder of your week, escaping into a fictional world—so that your choices reflect those goals and you do not find yourself reading work-related material that you are unable to squeeze into your hectic schedule.
- *Expressing Ourselves Creatively*—Writing (if you are not a writer by profession), drawing, painting, composing, choreographing, sculpting and landscaping are all traditionally prohibited on Shabbat

Perhaps through play, we can return to some degree to being children. Thus, the seventh day as a reminder of Creation can return us to the creation of ourselves. —J.G.K.

because they involve (among other prohibitions) creating something new, when the goal of Shabbat is to rest and appreciate what is already created. Many of us find, however, that creative activities such as those listed here can be an experience of opening up to the greater cosmos and aligning with forces that we don't ordinarily access. In this sense, it is indeed a prayerful yielding that is in the spirit of Shabbat; it is as close to that spirit as many of us will come.

- *Cultural Events*—Of course, a museum exhibit, a gallery show or an artistic performance of any kind has the capacity to elevate one's spirit, increasing our awareness of the intricate majesty of Creation.
- *Physical Rest*—If it is physical rest (*menuḥat Shabbat*) that you seek, then you may want to establish a regular routine of retiring early, sleeping late or taking afternoon naps. Depending on your level of exhaustion on Friday afternoon, or on whether you find services or visiting with people relaxing or exhausting, your goals for Shabbat rest may sometimes indeed be best accomplished by spending a part of the day catching up on sleep.

Jewish cultural or civilizational pursuits are especially appropriate ways of celebrating Shabbat. These include such activities as singing Jewish songs, playing in a klezmer band, studying the work of philosopher Baruch Spinoza and listening to Israeli music. The Jewish institutional world would do well to provide more opportunities for this sort of Shabbat celebration. —J.A.S.

In each of these instances and in countless other possibilities, the challenge is finding a way to enter into the spirit of Shabbat. If you are so inclined, consider saying a traditional *b'rakha* (blessing) such as *m'kadesh Hashabbat* (giving thanks for the gift of Sabbath holiness). Or you may want to compose your own blessing, through which you can declare (and remind yourself of) your intention to engage in this activity in the spirit of Shabbat, whatever that means to you. Part of the potential power of Shabbat is that it provides a regular, weekly opportunity for us to switch into the realm of *menuḥa*/rest, both in what we do and in our mode of consciousness.

### *A Full Day?*

Shabbat observed for a full 25 hours remains the ideal. Carving out one-seventh of our week and living in a Shabbat consciousness in which we are able to dial down the busyness of our lives and focus on things that have ultimate meaning offers the promise of transformation. This is true whether or not we set foot in a synagogue. Including many alternatives to traditional Shabbat observance here illustrates that each of us can find a distinct path into Shabbat experience, determined by our upbringing, experiences and spiritual proclivities.

Can you find friends or other people with similar interests to share these activities *as Shabbat activities*? For many people, that would deepen the power of the Shabbat experience. —J.A.S.

Perhaps most daunting is the challenge of observing Shabbat for a full day. That is the ideal. However, it is not an all-or-nothing choice, as so many people know who regularly light candles, make Kiddush, and have a Shabbat meal on Friday evenings without continuing Shabbat practice on Saturdays. Obviously, a piece of Shabbat is far better than none, and two or three pieces—for example, a leisurely Saturday afternoon stroll, a *Havdala* ceremony on Saturday evening—are better than one. You might also choose to make a resolution to concentrate on one or more of the Shabbat-spirit values that you find most powerful—to focus on family, for example, or to remain in a mindful, contemplative mode. With practice—as with any spiritual practice—you may find that pockets of Shabbat consciousness expand and eventually join to make a full day.

“More than Israel has kept the Sabbath,” the great Hebrew essayist Ahad Ha’am wrote, “the Sabbath has kept Israel.” Shabbat is a gift, available for our enjoyment and the deepening of our lives.