

# A PALACE IN TIME

## OUR JEWISH YEAR SESSION 3: SHABBAT

### BIG QUESTIONS FOR THIS SESSION:

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Shabbat is often understood as being about turning off, about not doing, about giving something up. In what ways does Shabbat mean tuning in, and doing, and gaining something special? What Shabbat traditions and messages speak to you? What would a personal Shabbat practice look like for you?

### BEFORE THE SESSION:

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Read Abby Pogrebin's chapters on Shabbat in *My Jewish Year*, pp. 135-141; 239-247; 277-282

### MATERIALS:

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Name tags, or table-top name cards

Pens or markers

### WHEN YOU ARRIVE (5:00):

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For at least the first several sessions, please ask everyone in the group to wear a name tag (or, if seated around a table, to place a name card in front of them). Even if most people know one another, it is important that no one feel uncomfortable for not remembering everyone else's name.

### TU B'SHVAT: REFLECTING ON YOUR PRACTICE (10:00)

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1. Did you engage with the themes of Tu B'Shvat after the last session? How did they play out?
2. Do you feel a deeper connection with the holiday? Why or why not?

**SHABBAT (שַׁבָּת): DIVING INTO OUR TRADITION (20:00)**

*In her chapters on Shabbat, Abby Pogrebin mentions 39 actions that are prohibited on Shabbat; she also references Abraham Joshua Heschel's view of Shabbat as a "palace in time." The following passages are taken from the primary source texts she referred to in her book. Please have one member read each of the passages aloud.*

Mishnah Shabbat 7:2

אַבוֹת מְלָאכוֹת אַרְבָּעִים חֲסֵר אֶחָת. הַזֹּרֵעַ. וְהַחוֹרֵשׁ. וְהַקּוֹצֵר. וְהַמְעַמֵּר. הַדָּשׁ. וְהַזּוֹרֵה. הַבוֹרֵר. הַטּוֹחֵן. וְהַמְרַקֵּד. וְהַלֵּשׁ. וְהַאֹפֶה. הַגּוֹזֵז אֶת הַצֶּמֶר. הַמְלַבֵּן. וְהַמְנַפֵּץ. וְהַצּוֹבֵעוֹ. וְהַטּוֹנֶה. וְהַמְסִיד. וְהַעוֹשֶׂה שְׁנֵי כְּתֵי גֵרִין. וְהַאֹרֵג שְׁנֵי חוּטִין. וְהַפּוֹצֵעַ שְׁנֵי חוּטִין. הַקּוֹשֵׁר. וְהַמְתִּיר. וְהַתּוֹפֵר שְׁתֵּי תְּפִירוֹת. הַקּוֹרֵעַ עַל מְנַת לְתַפֵּר שְׁתֵּי תְּפִירוֹת. הַצָּד צָבִי. הַשּׁוֹחֵטוֹ. וְהַמְפְּשִׁיטוֹ. הַמּוֹלְחוֹ, וְהַמְעַבֵּד אֶת עוֹרוֹ. וְהַמּוֹחֵקוֹ. וְהַמְחַסְכוֹ. הַפּוֹתֵב שְׁתֵּי אוֹתִיּוֹת. וְהַמּוֹחֵק עַל מְנַת לְכַתֵּב שְׁתֵּי אוֹתִיּוֹת. הַבוֹנֶה. וְהַסּוֹתֵר. הַמְכַבֶּה. וְהַמְבַעֵר. הַמְכֶה בַּפִּטְיֵשׁ. הַמוֹצִיא מְרִשׁוֹת לְרִשׁוֹת. הָרִי אֵלּוֹ אַבוֹת מְלָאכוֹת אַרְבָּעִים חֲסֵר אֶחָת:

The principal *Melakhot* [types of work prohibited on Shabbat] [number] forty minus one: Sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, sorting, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, whitening it, combing it, dyeing it, spinning, weaving, making two loops, weaving two threads, separating two threads, tying [a knot], untying [a knot], sewing two stitches, tearing for the purpose of sewing two stitches, hunting a deer, slaughtering it, skinning it, salting it, curing its hide, scraping it, cutting it, writing two letters, erasing for the purpose of writing two letters, building, demolishing, extinguishing a flame, lighting a flame, striking with a hammer, carrying from one domain to another. These are the principal *Melakhot* [numbering] forty minus one.

Abraham Joshua Heschel (*The Sabbath*, 1951, pp. 8-21)

Judaism is a *religion of time* aiming at the *sanctification of time*. Unlike the space-minded man to whom time is unvaried, iterative, homogeneous, to whom all hours are alike, qualitless, empty shells, the Bible senses the diversified character of time. There are no two hours alike. Every hour is unique and the only one given at the moment, exclusive and endlessly precious. ...The seventh day is like a palace in time with a kingdom for all. It is not a date but an atmosphere.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

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The Mishnah frames Shabbat in terms of prohibition (loss); Heschel frames Shabbat in terms of sanctification (gain). Which view resonates most with you? Which feels most closely related to the idea of a day of rest?

IS SHABBAT ABOUT GAINING OR LOSING? (20:00)

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*Take a few minutes and consider these questions. Members may wish to write their answers in the boxes provided below:*

If you were granted an *additional* day each week, how would you spend that time?

If you had one *fewer* day each week, what would you stop doing?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. For your extra day, what kinds of activities did you add? How about for the lost day-- what kinds of activities did you eliminate? Did they involve work? Family? Self-care? Do these activities speak to obligation or to pleasure?
2. How did you prioritize the activities for the extra day? For the lost day?
3. If you think of Shabbat as a day set apart from all other days, how is it like gaining a day? How is it like losing a day?

## FINDING MEANING IN SHABBAT (20:00)

*In My Jewish Year, Abby Pogrebin shares the reflections of a Humanist rabbi in Chicago, Adam Chalom. Please have one member read aloud the following passage from My Jewish Year (p. 245):*

...Chalom's admonition comes back to me: "The ultimate question is, 'What does Shabbat mean to you?' If you read the text of Shabbat, it's a Creationist holiday. In six days, the world was made; Creation stopped on the seventh. Well, the vast majority of Jews under the liberal spectrum are not Creationist. So there's an instant disconnect many people have with the language that's being used."

I see his point: if we don't buy the premise of Shabbat, Shabbat is mutable. It's up to us to redefine it, or to decide what aspects of it speak to us. And what if we don't believe the effusive words we pour about God on Shabbat? "Many Jews don't believe in a personally interventionist God, who either wants or needs all the praise," says Chalom. "So I think part of the challenge is that disconnect with what Shabbat means at its root. Is it a Creationist holiday commemorating the creation of the world and the creator of the world? Or is it a space for Jewish identity?"

Shabbat: a space in which to construct our own Jewish identity, a room each of us can fill with our own furniture.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think of Shabbat as a Creationist holiday? Does this understanding of Shabbat add meaning for you, or drive you away?
2. Do you think of Shabbat as a holiday creating space for Jewish identity? Does this understanding add meaning or drive you away?
3. What would it mean to "fill Shabbat with your own furniture"? What furniture would you fill it with?
4. How can Shabbat be a "palace in time" for you?

## CONCLUSION (10:00)

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*Reboot” is an organization dedicated to creative, modern Jewish practice. In Reboot’s Sabbath Manifesto, it identifies 10 Principles of Shabbat observance, which can be done individually or all together. Each can be interpreted in a variety of ways. They are:*

1. Avoid technology.
2. Connect with loved ones.
3. Nurture your health.
4. Get outside.
5. Avoid commerce.
6. Light candles.
7. Drink wine.
8. Eat bread.
9. Find silence.
10. Give back.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

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1. Which of these principles would be the easiest to implement?
2. Which would be the hardest?
3. Which, if you could do it, would make the biggest difference in your life?
4. Which, if any, relates to your answer about how you would spend the “extra day” of the week?
5. What would you add to this list?

*Next session will begin with a reflection on each participant’s experience of celebrating Shabbat. There’s no pressure to change the way anyone celebrates, this will simply be an opportunity to reflect back on how these discussions impacted how participants think about this holiday.*

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