

Yom Kippur Chavurah Shabbat 5775/2014

RABBI LONDON: Today is Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year. We gather to reflect on ourselves, ask God for forgiveness, and pray that in the coming year we will be more compassionate, forgiving, and just. Today is also Shabbat. In holiness, it's right up there with Yom Kippur and it comes every week to help us rest and refresh ourselves, reflect on our lives, and prepare us for the week ahead. But, unlike Yom Kippur, it's a day of celebration, joy and relaxing. Shabbat is always a special time at BE, but this year, we are going to explore together how we can strengthen the spirit of Shabbat in our homes, our lives, and our community.

The Torah gives two rationales for the Sabbath. First, we are reminded that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. This does not mean that after the sixth day of creation, the world was totally perfected. Rather, God models to us that our work must stop periodically, even though we're never done. By resting, we gain the spiritual and physical strength to keep up the work for the long term. We also develop a sense of humility.

The Torah's second rationale for the Sabbath hearkens back to the liberation of the Israelites from slavery. Slaves have no control over their time. They work at their master's will, all day, every day. Therefore, God commands the Israelites that as one of their first actions as free people, they should take back one day a week as their own. Free people can set boundaries for when we will and will not work. In taking this time for ourselves, we also remind ourselves that there are still millions of people who do not enjoy such a luxury. The Sabbath then should inspire us to work toward a world where every single person enjoys basic freedoms. (Sally Quinn)

As it is written (in Exodus 31:17)... It [Shabbat] will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days God made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed. (Exodus 31:17) (Rested and refreshed—Shavat Vayinafash.)

R. Simeon b. Lakish read these words creatively. In Talmud Beitzah 16a, He said: On the eve of the Sabbath the Holy One gives human beings an enlarged soul—a special nefesh." (Talmud Beitzah 16a)

The Sabbath Spice

(as told by Nina Jaffe, retold by Robert Haralack, and further edited by Cantor Ariki Luck)

CANTOR LUCK: *Long ago, in the kingdom of Persia, there lived a great scholar named Nehemiah. He lived very modestly with his family, and regularly worked worked hard into the evenings to make ends meet, although every Friday night he was home to begin the celebration of the Sabbath.*

At that time, Persia was ruled by the emperor Cyrus. One year, he decided to go on a journey, to travel among the towns and provinces so that he could come to know the ways of his subjects. Toward the end of his journey he stopped for the night near a small village just outside, Susa, the royal city. As the sun set, he heard a song emanating from one of the houses. Peering into the entranceway, he saw a family just sitting down to a meal. A delicious fragrance reached him and he was drawn to look closer. The head of the house, Nehemiah the scholar, saw the emperor and welcomed him in the Jewish tradition of hospitality to strangers.

As Nehemiah's family recited the blessings over Shabbat, the emperor took it all in, and he noticed Nehemiah's deep devotion to God. Soon afterward came the festive meal accompanied by singing and celebration. Cyrus had never tasted such delicious food.

After the meal, the emperor asked respectfully for the recipes of each of the dishes so that in the next days his cooks could prepare for him a similarly delicious feast.

Late that night, he commanded his royal cooks to prepare the exact same meal for him and his royal guests for the following evening. The next night, after extensive preparation with only the finest ingredients in the kingdom, the feast was ready. Cyrus was the first to touch his plate. But at the first bite, he was disappointed. The food did not have that special taste it had in Nehemiah's house. "Bring in the chief cook!", he said. "I will have his head! This food tastes nothing like the meal I had at the house of Nehemiah, the scholar."

The cook appeared before his master, both fearful and dumbfounded as to what could have gone wrong. He spoke: "Your Royal Highness, before you

send me to the gallows, why don't you call on the man who first served you this meal? Maybe he can tell you what went wrong."

The emperor was now determined to bring the matter to justice. He sent for Nehemiah, who was shortly escorted into the palace. The emperor growled: "When I visited your house, I had the most tasty delicious food I ever have had. I asked you for the recipe and you gave it to me. But this meal does not have that special taste. It is just an ordinary meal. Don't you know that there is a great punishment for deceiving your emperor, the ruler of Persia?"

Nehemiah was trembling with fear. He inspected the food. It was indeed properly recreated. What could have gone wrong? Then suddenly Nehemiah understood. He told the emperor, "Indeed the recipe was prepared exactly as I had instructed you. And your royal cooks bought all the correct ingredients, much higher in quality than my family used. However, there was one thing that was different. There is one spice that could not have been written as part of the recipe because it is not physical food. And this spice cannot be found in any garden or market in your whole kingdom. For this spice is spiritual and can only be absorbed into the food in a house of a family that is observing the Sabbath. The sweetness of the meal that you remember is this secret spice, the spice of the Sabbath day, present on the Sabbath, in a home that keeps the Sabbath holy and makes the Sabbath a special day. Only in that setting can the special spice of the Sabbath be tasted. So there is no fault of your cooks. For observing the Sabbath cannot be considered as part of a recipe for food."

The emperor thought and recalled the meal and its ceremony. He remembered the lighting of the Sabbath candles and its blessing. He remembered Kiddush and the blessing over the wine. He remembered the devotion to God he saw in Nehemiah and his family. He remembered all the delights of that Sabbath night - the soft light of the candles, the voices of the children as they prayed and sang, the smiling faces around the table as they shared the bread and wine. Now he understood what the scholar was saying. He waved his cook back to the kitchen and he gave permission for Nehemiah to take his leave. Before leaving Nehemiah told the emperor, "The royal emperor is welcome any time to come to our house on a Friday evening and participate again in our Sabbath meal."

So every now and then, during the week, Cyrus would send word to Nehemiah. In late Friday afternoon of that week, the emperor would come and visit with Nehemiah the scholar, and participate in the special Sabbath meal at the scholar's house. He longed to sample again the sweet taste of that special spice of the Sabbath.

BEKKI: What are our distinct Shabbat spices at Beth Emet?

ABBY: They are as varied as this community.

CANTOR LUCK: Here is just a sampling of reflections on the significance of Shabbat...

MARCI: ...as interpreted by poets, sages, scholars, comedians, and everyone in between.

Kathy: A great pianist was once asked by an ardent admirer:

“How do you handle the notes as well as you do?”

The artist answered: “The notes I handle no better than many pianists, but the pauses between the notes....ah!

That is where the art resides.”

In great living, as in great music, the art may be in the pauses. Surely one of the enduring contributions which Judaism made to the art of living was the Shabbat, “the pause between the notes.” And it is to the Shabbat that we must look if we are to restore to our lives the sense of serenity and sanctity which Shabbat offers in such joyous abundances. (Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel)

ABBY: I start to think about Shabbat when I get hassled at work. The earlier I get hassled at work, the sooner I start thinking about it. I think this week, I was thinking about it on Monday. I couldn't wait until Friday night. (Larry Neinstein)

BEKKI: The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation, from the world of creation to the creation of the world.” (Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel)

MARCI: There's something sensual about that. Tearing off and feeling the warmth and putting warm challah to the lips. It really carries warmth. (Sally Shafton)

BEKKI: There are some moments when I have to feel perfect, complete (shaleim). Six days a week I work like a dog and can't have that feeling. On Shabbos I receive a divinely inspired feeling of serenity, peacefulness, completeness—Shabbat Shalom—because of its holiness one feels perfection. This day will give you the strength to 'fix' yourself during the week. You will know what to 'fix' because you will have just experienced a period of time when you had a complete soul. (Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach)

CANTOR LUCK: I think that it is the out loud singing that helps me make the transition from the weekday to Shabbat, and I have encouraged others around the table to please try and sing out loud, because I find when you are singing out loud that it's hard to be very caught up in an argument that you have just had with a client or an attorney. (Bill Goodglick)

MARCI: It gives us a chance to unwind and to talk. We come back and it's just a completely different feeling in this household than any other night. You know that there are not going to be any phone calls coming in about business. It's time to get shut off. So it's a pretty nice feeling when you walk in the house. (Irene Weingarten)

RABBI LONDON: Why do we have Shabbat? Because the people were slaves and they understood what it was like not to have rest... The radical idea is that everyone, not just the upper classes, not just the priests and doctors and elites and the king have the right to rest in a regular way one day a week. Look, it was so radically progressive that it even mandated that you had to give your animals the day off. That's a radical idea. (Judith Shulevitz)

BEKKI: There is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord. Life goes wrong when the control of space, the acquisition of things of space, becomes our sole concern. (Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel)

MARCI: The best part of Shabbat for me is when I bless my children. I get to hug them and kiss them and they have to stand there and take it whether they like it or not. (Karen Vinocor)

KATHY: We always sing at least one Shabbat song. Whether we sing more than that is highly dependent on when I come home, how stressed I am. If I'm in a good mood and relaxed, then we may sing for a while. If I'm stressed out, it's Bim Bam and let's eat! (Larry Neinstein)

ABBY: We can feel a sense of urgency that there's so much important work in the world to be done. Tikkun Olam—we need to fix the world. Jewish tradition demands that we work hard to make the world a better place. "We believe that if we could somehow

work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, we would be far more productive.

But the very point of the Sabbath is to teach us that this all-encompassing approach to work helps neither us nor the world.

Refreshed and renewed,

Attired in festive garments,

With candles nodding dreamily to

Unutterable expectations,

To intuitions of eternity,

Some of us are overcome with a feeling

As if almost all they would say would be like a veil.

There is not enough grandeur in our souls

To be able to unravel in words

The knot of time and eternity.

One should like to sing for all people,

For all generations...

There is a song in the wind

And joy in the trees.

The Sabbath arrives in the world,

Scattering a song in the silence of the night;

Eternity utters a day. Where are the words

That could compete with such might? (Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel)

CANTOR LUCK: May it be God's Will, that I be privileged to receive this holy Shabbat with happiness and joy, with song and excitement. Protect me so that no sadness or depression, no anguish or worry will mar my Shabbat. May I be happy with all my soul, with all my heart and with all my strength. Let this happiness without limit encompass the world. (Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav)

RABBI LONDON: This year in which we explore Shabbat together is also a Shmita year. Jewish tradition teaches us not only that we have a weekly Shabbat for rest and refreshment, but that every seven years, we have a year of rest. This doesn't mean we get vacation for the whole year, but every seventh year, the Torah commands farmers not to till their fields and to let poor people and animals feed off what grows; separately, it mandates that all debts be forgiven during shmita years.

KATHY: In Israel, people are rethinking how to make this concept of shmita relevant to our modern lives. There are laws for those who are farmers, but what about the rest of us?

BEKKI: Sara Halevi is the communications director at the Israeli company *Energiya*. Her personal shmita commitments include exchanging the yellow pads she brings to meetings for a laptop, and leaving that laptop at the office four nights a week.

ABBY: Yossi Tsuria, a founder of NDS, a video-software company now part of Cisco Systems, has been promoting a list of 49 things technology firms might try to fulfill the shmita spirit.

KATHY: Number 32: A year without exorbitant bonuses. The money can be directed to social causes.

BEKKI: Think of the sheer number of people who could be helped by such an action were this to be taken on globally.

MARCI: Number 40: The workday will be no longer than eight hours and the work week will have no more than five days.

KATHY: That'll be the day right? But imagine having all of that time for family, personal growth, and recharging? Perhaps we would all be more productive at work if we actually allowed ourselves to stop working once and a while.

ABBY: Number 41: Email only works during business hours.

BEKKI: That one speaks for itself!

CANTOR LUCK: And apparently this idea seems to be taking hold outside of Israel as well; It has been reported that the German government is moving toward actual legislation in the coming year which would effectively ban late night work emails, as a means of protecting the mental health of the nation's workers.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/29/germany-work-email_n_5883924.html

ANDREA: Back in Israel, four nonprofit groups have enrolled 1,500 families each with debts of about \$25,000 into an eight-month budgeting seminar.

ABBY: Those who complete it will have to pay only a third of their reduced debt; the groups promise to collect donations to cover another third, and convince creditors to forgive the rest.

CANTOR LUCK: A form of this idea has also taken hold here at home. The Occupy Movement has begun buying out both medical and student loan debt that large health care providers and student lenders are trying to get rid of because of the inability of the consumer to pay them off.

KATHY: The student loan company that was targeted was so questionable in its practice to begin with, that it was already being investigated by the Federal government for predatory and strong arm tactics.

BEKKI: Once acquired by the Occupy Movement, the loans were simply forgiven, and the customers were informed via mail that their debt had been erased.

MARCI: To date, they have forgiven medical and student loan debt totalling almost 5 million dollars.

<http://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/occupy-movement-takes-student-debt>

ABBY: We have now heard about how the SHMITA year may be applied, both in Israel and elsewhere, on both a national and a personal level.

KATHY: But how does it affect us here as a community?

BEKKI: ...and how does it affect you?

ANDREA: Take a moment and think about how this could be a year where we consume less and where we tread more lightly on our fragile planet.

CANTOR LUCK HOLDS UP THE SPICE JAR, WHICH WILL BE GIVEN OUT TO EVERYONE AS THEY LEAVE

CANTOR LUCK: What are you going to put in your Shabbat spice jar this week?

BEKKI: And what are you going to put into your spice jar this SHMITA year?

MARCI: Love and compassion

BEKKI: Peace and respect

KATHY: Mindful consumption

CANTOR LUCK: Caring for the planet

ABBY: Reflection and social consciousness

RABBI LONDON: Reverence for life.