

Shabbat and Healing

An Issue Devoted to Shabbat



“**T**he cycle of Jewish time brings us a rich tapestry of reflections on core issues in the lives of those living with illness and personal challenge, from mortality and the fragility of life to its abundance, from joy, light and hope to relief and laughter, from slavery to liberation and wisdom, and back again.” (Rabbi Amy Eilberg)

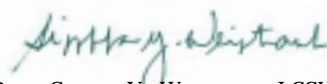
Over the years, *The Outstretched Arm* has explored various Jewish holidays — *Pesach*, *Hanukkah*, the High Holidays, *Sukkot*, *Purim*, *Shavu'ot* — as central resources in the Jewish healing journey.

But — right under our nose — we realized that we had neglected to explore *Shabbat*, our weekly holy day that offers us an opportunity to join with the community and the Eternal for a “taste of heaven,” a special type of spiritual rest and renewal.

In this edition we begin to explore the healing dimensions of *Shabbat*, through a chorus of diverse voices, from a broad range of personal challenges. You will find articles on personal journeys of healing through *Shabbat* (pg. 1) • healing approaches to *Shabbat* rituals (pgs. 2-3) • commentaries on the Torah's dual *Shabbat* commandments (pgs. 4-5) • an approach to both “entering” *Shabbat* as a newcomer and on “adapting” it to personal challenges (pg. 6) • and website resources from the NCJH and the network of Jewish healing centers (pg. 8).

Thank you to everyone who contributed their time and creativity to this newsletter.

Shabbat Shalom/May your weekly *Shabbat* bring you peace!


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BRAIDED SOULS

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Shabbat, we are told, is 1/60 of the World to Come. When we light the candles and our work-day souls go off to the celestial cleaners to be replaced for 24 hours by *Shabbat's* extra soul, we get to bask in 1/60 of a world of perfection and healing. Even 1/60 of that wholeness is a place of great comfort.

For those of us who are afflicted, as I am with the challenge of a uterine sarcoma, *Shabbat* is an opportunity to shift to an imaginal world where we envision the healing for which we actively strive during the rest of the week. During *Shabbat* we swim in the mikvah (which also means hope) of healing. We open souls and cells to the possibility of healing and receive its blessing.

Last *Shabbat*, too weak to stand, I sat with eyes closed through the service. Softly I sang the prayers, as I listened with my pores, allowing the words of *Shabbat* that rose around me to penetrate my body and reach to my soul. With my eyes closed, other senses stretched. I took in *Shabbat* through my ears, skin, nose and mouth and was penetrated by *Shabbat's* perfection and healing. With eyes closed, inner darkness transformed into shimmering light.

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The OUTSTRETCHED ARM

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Rituals:

Introduction

According to our tradition, The Eternal created Shabbat as a weekly holiday that arrives at a specific time — just before sunset Friday evening — and lasts until the stars appear in the darkened sky on Saturday night. No matter where we are in geography or productivity, we can reach out and savor this precious gift which Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel describes as “creating a sanctuary in time.”

We enter and enjoy Shabbat through special rituals, acts and prayers infused with the *kavannah* (spirit) of the day — an immersion into the realm of wholeness and rest. The meals we eat on Shabbat become feasts, rich with flavor, conversation and singing. We light candles and study words of Torah; we may go for a leisurely walk, visit with friends and take a Shabbat nap. All of these are among the many gateways to Shabbat and to spiritual renewal.

In this section, we offer reflections on several Shabbat rituals and practices. We hope these commentaries inspire you to explore the healing possibilities inherent in Shabbat.



Shabbat Candles – A Pathway to God

CAROL P. HAUSMAN, PH.D.

Coordinator, Washington Jewish Healing Network

“What is it that Jewish people say when they light the candles on Friday night?” This question came from a member of a Jewish spiritual support group on issues of aging. After the group discussed a midrash on Moses’ death which ended with, “And God took away the soul of his servant Moses with a kiss, and God wept,” someone in the group blurted out, “Well, God’s not going to weep when I die — I haven’t been in a synagogue in twenty years.” The question was really asking, “How can I get closer to God before I die?” and the questioner somehow recognized that lighting the Shabbat candles may open a pathway to God. The group members were invited to make up their own prayers for the following Shabbat, and later they learned the traditional prayers. The group eventually arrived at a combination — blending words from the tradition with words from the heart (a formula which Rabbi Reuven Hammer recommends in *Entering Jewish Prayer*.)

In a group for parents of adult children who are estranged from them, we learned that one of the parents said a silent prayer for her son as she lit the Shabbat candles. Others began doing the same, encouraged to say the blessing aloud so that the whole family, including the missing child, was included in the entrance to their Shabbat celebration. The candle lighting ritual helped them move toward the *mitzvah* of suspending mourning on Shabbat, a big challenge when a child is estranged and distant.

Lighting the candles marks the moment when pain somehow diminishes, a day of some peace begins and we become more acutely aware of being in God’s presence.

A Shabbat Walk

RABBI NATAN FENNER, BCC
The Bay Area Jewish Healing Center, San Francisco, CA

A Shabbat walk can open the door for spiritual renewal. *L'kha dodi* — come, my friend, step outside with me and let's share some reflections along the way...

Whether embarking on a two-hour walk through hillside trails, or a twenty minute stroll around the neighborhood or in your imagination — we soon experience the sights and sensations of sky and breeze, of “outside” voices, of nature, closer and of our own movement. We take audible deep breaths. After covering some ground, we notice we have fallen into an easy pace; perhaps we use the gentle rhythm of footsteps and arm-swinging to stretch, calm or energize ourselves. The choices before us — of where to look, what to notice, which way to turn — are different than when we are moving about in a building, riding in a vehicle or focused on an errand. As we reach a hilly vista or traverse a quiet park or a broad avenue, we appreciate our sense of place, and the wider horizon for our imagination and spirits. The lengthening stroll allows for creative thinking, pleasant silences, internal dialogues and musical scores, or unhurried, thoughtful conversation, all abetted by our sense of forward movement (and perhaps by our sense of momentum and continuity from a prior Shabbat walk). As we near the end of our outing, we are likely calmer, de-compressed, ready for rest or re-engagement with family and community. Whether we walked by ourselves, with God or with another friend, we are thankful for the companionship. Shabbat Shalom!



Greeting the Mourners

Nichum Aveilim

RABBI JOSEPH S. OZAROWSKI, DMIN.
Jewish Healing Network of Chicago, JFCS

The moment is a bittersweet and poignant one. Following the congregation's joyous chanting of *L'kha Dodi* at a *Kabbalat Shabbat* Friday night service, there is a pause. The mourners who are in the week of *Shiva*, the week immediately following the funeral, having remained outside the sanctuary, walk in. Those present then intone the traditional words of condolence said at a *Shiva* house, “May *HaMakom* — the One who is always present — comfort you among the other mourners for Zion and Jerusalem.” The words of comfort serve to embrace the bereaved as they emerge from the *Shiva* home where *Kaddish* is said and visitors are received. But Shabbat itself is healing and comforting and there are no public rituals of mourning on Shabbat. Until this point the mourners have been separated from the full sense of community by their loss. As the shul-going community welcomes the mourners before reciting Psalm 92, which traditionally marks the commencement of Shabbat, the mourners are reunited with their community, for comfort and consolation. Shabbat, the taste of the world to come, has healed the breach in some small way.

TOO LONG IN THE VALLEY...

RABBI SIMKHA Y. WEINTRAUB, LCSW
Rabbinic Director, JBFCS/NCJH

In welcoming Shabbat, one of the most beautiful songs is surely the *L'kha Dodi*, “Come, My Beloved,” composed in 16th century Safed by Solomon HaLevi Alkabetz. There's plenty to love about this mystically beautiful hymn, but one phrase that has always reverberated is in the third stanza: “*Too long have you dwelled in the valley of tears...*”

To me, those words always meant: “Shabbat is here; enough sadness/despair!” But I wondered where in the Torah these words actually came from and what they might have meant in context.

Turns out they are from Psalm 84, a psalm in search of spiritual place — of finding one's home in God's house. Verses 6-7 read:

“Fortunate is the one whose
fortress is in You,
in whose heart are the highways,
who, passing in “*the valley of Bakha*,”
turns it into a fountain spring...”

Commentaries are perplexed about the meaning of “the valley of *Bakha*.” Three suggestions have been offered:

1. On their way up to the Temple, pilgrims had to pass through a parched, waterless “valley of *Bakha*.”
2. Others identify it with “*Emek R'faim*,” “the valley of phantoms/cures,” where mulberry trees (*b'khaim*) grew.
3. Finally, this valley is identified with “*Gei Ben Hinnom*,” “Hell Valley,” since those who descend into Hell weep (*bokhim*).

Perhaps it is all three. In other words, as Shabbat enters, we are told:

“*Too long have you dwelled in a parched, waterless place...*”
“*Too long have you dwelled in treatments and doctors' appointments...*”
“*Too long have you dwelled in hellish distress, in weeping that is miserable...*”

The stanza concludes with “God will restore you with compassion and grace.” So, to quote from the world of recovery, *it is time to let go and let God*.

Finding Shabbat

RABBI NANCY FLAM

Co-Director of Programs, Institute for Jewish Spirituality

"My illness and my need for healing has opened up a desire to connect with something Jewish. How can I find my way into Shabbat?"

There are many pathways in; perhaps I can best offer some guidance by sharing my own experience of finding Shabbat.

I began celebrating Shabbat from what I've since only half-jokingly termed a "pathological loneliness." I found myself a Jewish girl from suburban Los Angeles, far from home, attending a college in rural New England that was neither culturally sensitive to girls nor to Jews. There was a Hillel on campus, and I knew that they sponsored both Friday night services and dinners.

From the first time I entered the school's chapel, I found the *Erev Shabbat*/Friday night Shabbat service to be a refuge. I continued to go and participate. I could cry, pray, sing, be silent, socialize afterwards or quietly slip away, and know that I had belonged, that I was

welcome, that there was a circle, a tradition and a wisdom large enough to hold me and whatever I might be feeling. Upon reflection, I realize that Shabbat had become my gateway, the hole I blessedly slipped through to lead me to the wonderland of Jewish life. It was just what I needed at that time of tremendous change and confusion.

Shabbat, I found, was reliable and good. At the end of the week, there she is waiting for us like a good mother with her enfolding arms of unconditional love, taking us in, no matter how the world, the week or our work has battered us. Shabbat doesn't care about externals of any kind. She sees right through our aching bodies, our troubled minds. Shabbat whispers with the setting sun, "You are a soul. Go there. Rest there in awareness of soul." All the liturgy and other rituals of Shabbat are there to help us rest in awareness of soul, of the deep, transpersonal light of knowing and being that is our essence. And it is there we find comfort and healing — week after week after week.

Shavat Vayinafash: Rested and "Resouled"

RABBI NANCY WIENER, DMIN.

Clinical Director, Blaustein Center for Pastoral Counseling, HUC-JIR

"Observance of Shabbat has been an important part of my life. My illness makes it difficult to make Shabbat and to participate in the way I used to. I feel a real loss. How can I get Shabbat back?"

Taking a respite from time and its everyday activities and finding a way to reclaim our souls, our true selves, as the liturgy says, "*Shavat vayinafash*" — these are the essence of Shabbat.

Cooking and cleaning, going to synagogue may have been the ways in which Shabbat used to punctuate your week, reminding you: rest and 'resoul.' But now, getting to shul, sitting through services, cooking or enjoying food are out of the question. You spend the entire week reclining or sitting. How do you take a rest from what you used to use to make Shabbat special? How can you connect with and appreciate Shabbat?

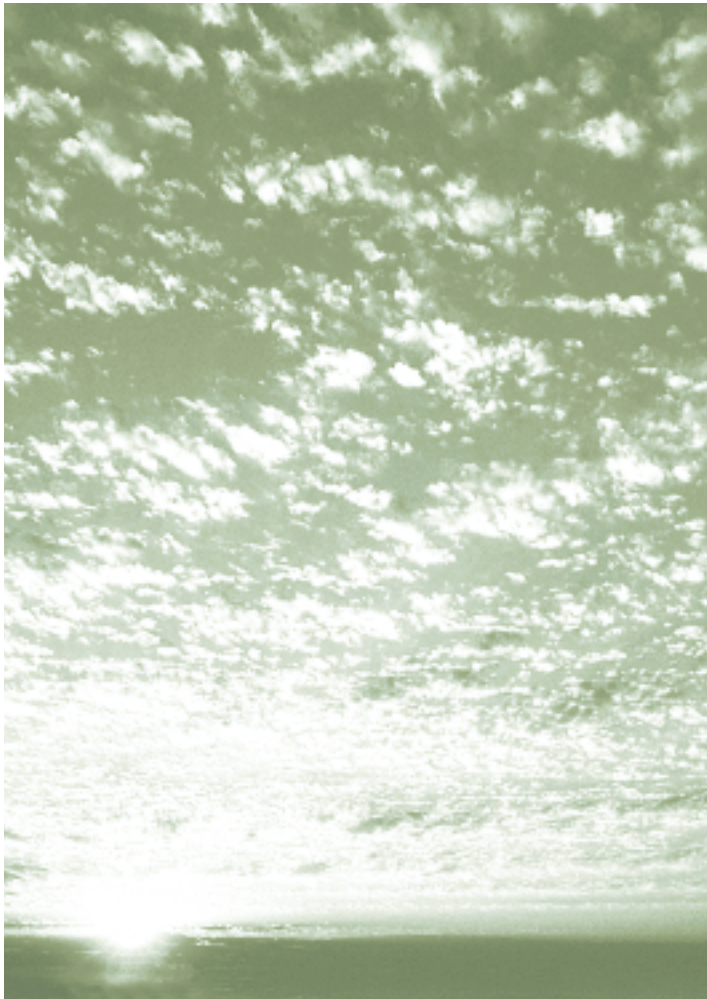
Shabbat is all about refocusing and getting to the essence of things. Was it cooking or gathering family and friends around and offering them physical and emotional nurturance that brought you pleasure? Was going to synagogue an opportunity to catch up with friends and family or to pray with those who shared a history, a heritage, a set of values and hopes or to offer

personal prayer amidst fellow prayers, or to enter a holy space in which God's presence is more palpable or a scheduled moment to take a deep breath, to take stock, to remember that all of life need not be the same?

Losing familiar ways of preparing for and celebrating Shabbat is painful. Giving yourself ample space to mourn such losses is important. But, you need not give up Shabbat entirely.

Midrash calls a home "*mikdash me'at*," a small sanctuary. Consider making a spot in your house or a focal point in your bedroom your *mikdash*, your sacred space...where you go physically, visually or emotionally to experience the Divine presence. There you can pray, alone or with others. Let music transport your soul beyond your body, linking you with Jewish community past and present. Invite family and friends to make music, play a recording, or just hum or sing to yourself so that you can be open to welcome Shabbat. Ask friends and family to visit with you on Shabbat. Those who come or call before shul can be your emissaries to the larger community. Those who come after can catch you up on what went on, and what they learned about community members and from the *parsha*, so that you can discuss it with them or just ponder the day's messages, rested and resouled.

BRAIDED SOULS continued from page 1



How could I leave Shabbat's holy place?

The Havdalah ceremony is the bridge upon which we receive our replenished workday souls and infuse them with Shabbat's hope and serenity. As Shabbat ended, I met my cleansed soul with the blessings of senses refined in the Shabbat mikvah, as symbolized by wine, spices and the braided candle.

Wine "Gladdens the heart." It is the fluid of THE hope, in which we marinate for the hours of Shabbat. Through Havdalah, that hope flowed into my new week, as I prepared to meet the challenges of treatment with an increased belief in my potential for healing.

Spices symbolize Shabbat's sweetness. As I inhaled they took on anti-oxidant properties. I sniffed the spice-box and breathed trace minerals of Shabbat to fortify my returning soul.

The braided candle welcomed the soul with the warmth of shimmering light that my senses revealed with my eyes closed. My Shabbat and workday souls embraced as they danced together — braiding, healing, blessing and delight — before heading into their respective worlds. And with the song of Elijah, blessings rose for a Shavuah Tov — a Good Week.

"Whoever spends for the Shabbat is repaid by the Shabbat."

— TALMUD, SHABBAT 119A

This issue of *The Outstretched Arm* explores the healing power of Shabbat.

Like everything from the National Center for Jewish Healing, its goal is to make Jewish spiritual resources available and meaningful to those who are suffering and those who care for them.

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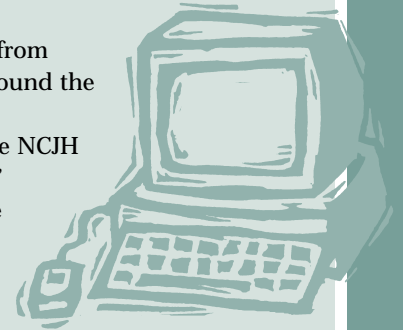
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As this publication contains a representation of God's name, please treat it with proper care and respect.

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A JBFCs Rita J. Kaplan Jewish Connections Program

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