

Shabbat Shalom! Gut Shabbos!

Brit Tzedek v'Shalom: The Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace is proud to be a diverse and inclusive organization. We reflect the unique pluralism of the U.S. Jewish community; our various forms of Jewish expression make for a fascinating, wide ranging combination.

Some of us observe the Sabbath in some form or another. Some of us know nothing of Shabbat observance. Some of us are eager to learn about traditional Jewish laws and customs. Others have experience in this realm and want nothing more to do with it. In an effort to welcome and include everyone, we have developed this introduction to traditional Shabbat observance. Your own customs and experience may be very different, of course. All we ask is the following:

- If you are not Shabbat observant, please take note of the special restrictions and enhancements that our Shabbat-observant members require in order to participate in this program on Friday night and Saturday.
- If you are observant and feel that your needs are not being met, please see one of us and we will do our best to remedy the situation. We will gladly arrange a space for you to hold an alternative service or study session, for example.
- If you would like to learn more about Jewish observance, or if *the traditions with which you are familiar are not presented here*, please feel free to speak up and let us know.
- If you are not observant and don't wish to be part of anything religious, remember that you will not be expected to participate in any activity against your wishes.

“More than [the Jews] have kept the Sabbath; the Sabbath has kept [the Jewish people.]”

---Ahad Ha'Am (Asher Ginsberg)

The Sabbath – *Shabbat* in Hebrew – is the most sacred day of the Jewish calendar. It begins each Friday at sunset and ends 25 hours later, one hour past sunset and/or as soon as three stars are visible in the Saturday night sky. Traditionally, Shabbat is ushered in by lighting candles; we mark its ending with a ritual called *Havdalah*, which means “distinction”.

Shabbat is intended to be a time of total peace and rest; a day set apart from the hectic work week; a guarantee that at least once a week we will have time to enjoy ourselves with friends and family. The word *Shabbat* means to cease or to rest – but does not just refer to abstinence from labor. On Shabbat, we actively seek a sense of harmony through a variety of *shabbosdik* (Yiddish for “in the spirit of Sabbath”) activities that might include prayer, meditation and song; festive eating and drinking; study, reflection and exchange of ideas; long walks; and visits with friends. Ideally, Shabbat incorporates the most cherished values of Jewish tradition: the sanctity and dignity of each human life; the central concept of covenant or relationship; the warmth, closeness and mutual respect of community life.

Shabbat is one of the best known, yet least understood of all Jewish observances. Sadly, it has developed an undeserved reputation as a day filled with stifling restrictions. Traditional Shabbat observance does involve certain curtailments of behavior, but we also expand our weekday horizons with special Sabbath enhancements. Thus, Shabbat is the opposite of a burden; it is a precious time when we are liberated from mundane concerns and encouraged to devote ourselves to more interesting, more enjoyable pursuits.

Shabbat observers interpret the work restrictions in various ways, so it is likely that you will meet Jews who keep *Shabbos* differently. This is because the type of “work” from which we refrain in *Shabbat* has nothing to do with physical labor and effort, or employment. Many people might think that turning on a

light would be permitted, because it does not require effort, but a rabbi or cantor would not be permitted to lead Shabbat services, because leading services is their employment. Jewish law prohibits the former and permits the latter.

Only specific types of “work” that are prohibited on Shabbat: acts that are creative, or that exercise control or dominion over one’s environment. The Hebrew word for this, *Melachah*, is rarely used outside of the context of Shabbat and holiday restrictions. The only other repeated use of the word is in the discussions of the building of the sanctuary in the wilderness (Exodus Ch. 31, 35-38.) Notably, the Shabbat restrictions are reiterated during this discussion (Ex. 31:13), so our sages inferred that the work of creating the sanctuary has to be stopped for Shabbat. From this, they concluded that the “work” prohibited on Shabbat is the same as the work of creating the sanctuary. They found 39 types of work that were needed to build the sanctuary, and all Shabbat restrictions are based upon these:

1. Sowing
 2. Plowing
 3. Reaping
 4. Binding sheaves
 5. Threshing
 6. Winnowing
 7. Sorting items
 8. Grinding
 9. Sifting
 10. Kneading
 11. Baking
 12. Shearing
 13. Washing wool
 14. Beating wool
 15. Dyeing wool
 16. Spinning
 17. Weaving
 18. Making two or more loops
 19. Weaving two or more threads
 20. Separating two or more threads
 21. Tying
 22. Untying
 23. Sewing two or more stitches
 24. Tearing
 25. Trapping
 26. Slaughtering
 27. Flaying
 28. Salting meat
 29. Curing hides
 30. Scraping hides
 31. Cutting hides
 32. Writing at least two letters
 33. Erasing two or more letters
 34. Building
 35. Tearing a building down
 36. Extinguishing a fire
 37. Kindling a fire
 38. Hitting with a hammer
 39. Taking an object from the private domain to the public, or transporting an object in the public domain.
- Mishna Shabbat, 7:2*

In addition to these tasks, any activity that operates by the same principle or has the same purpose is prohibited. The tradition has also come to prohibit buying and selling, and other weekday tasks that would interfere with the spirit of Shabbat.

While nobody will be hammering or weaving or scraping hides at this Institute, many of the above forms of *melachah* or related tasks will be happening. *Of course you must feel free to do whatever you like, but please to not request that anyone else do anything involving melachah from Friday at sundown through havdalah.* Activities to be especially sensitive about include:

- Turning on or off lights, AV equipment, or any other electric appliance. This is prohibited because it serves the same function as fire or some of the other prohibitions, or because it is technically considered to be “fire”.
- Writing
- Video and/or audio taping or photographing
- Cutting or tearing of paper or other materials
- Carrying anything in or out of the hotel; carrying within is fine, being our “private domain.”

As with all commandments, any of these Shabbat restrictions not only may but *must* be violated if necessary to save a human life.

In addition to these restrictions, participants will be enjoying many of the special *Shabbos* songs, prayers and other activities that make the day special, joyful and uplifting. You are more than welcome to join us, and to ask us questions.

Regardless of if or how you celebrate *Shabbat*, we wish you a fill day of *shalom*!

Written by Rabbi Rebecca Lillian