

Make Shabbat Happen

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Rosh Hashanah AM 5775

Marne Levine, a VP at Facebook, tells this story: I had flown across country and was reconnecting with an old friend, someone I hadn't seen in years. I was really excited. We sit down at a table in a restaurant and start to catch up, and I start to get this feeling inside, and it won't go away... there was my phone on the table next to me, and I knew it would be rude to check it, but... I couldn't stay focused on my friend. I felt so guilty, what was wrong with me?! Finally, and I am so ashamed to say this, I told her I had to go to the bathroom. I sat in the stall checking my emails, plugged into my phone more than I was plugged into my old friend, and I knew I had hit bottom. I use technology all of the time, and I didn't know how to disconnect, even when I really, really wanted to.

Marne's life describes so many of our lives...whether it is Facebook, Instagram, our iPhone or Droids, or our tablets... they enrich our lives, they take over our lives. To whatever extent we use them, they have changed the way we interface- whoops I mean- meet and talk with- each other.

The truth is, Marne needs Shabbat. But she is not alone. When Robert Putnam wrote *Bowling Alone* in the year 2000, he told us that the more we are connected by virtual community- the lonelier we are in actuality. Shabbat is the single best hope we have to disconnect from the lure of technology, but more: it is the single best hope we have to reconnect to each other in meaningful, ongoing, deeply committed ways. One of the things technology can't replace is what it means, at the deepest level, to be part of a community and to be in the presence of others.

But Shabbat is more than a vehicle for stepping away from technology and toward ourselves and others. Shabbat is our best path to the spirituality we so desire in our lives. It is the open door to the sacred, something many of us have become strangers to. It is the balance we need in our lives.

Think of Shabbat this way. In yoga, every pose has a counterpose. In weightlifting, we lift, then we counter with rest. In running, we sweat, and then we re-hydrate. The physical depletion of each day-- we counter with a night's sleep. We have learned, with our physical selves, to balance stress with counter stress, but have we learned how to counter that stress that our soul carries, the concerns that weigh upon us all week? Shabbat is our counterpose to the work of the week.

Don't be lured into thinking the counterpose to work is recreation, feeding our pleasure. Recreation is not the same as re-newing our soul- and make no mistake, it is our souls that are depleted from the daily grind of managing life. We can offer ourselves good food, expensive wine, recreation toys... and find that our souls are no fuller, deeper, richer.

We need to make **Shabbat happen** for ourselves because our labor threatens to become 24/7. Almost half of us in the work force work something different than the traditional work week. For many of you, work is as close as your cell phone, your email, or your home office. It is always calling, either literally or in the recesses of your mind, and the always new-and-improved products we have created to make our lives easier and give us more free time... seem to take all our free time to manage, repair, and master. Author Judith

Shulevitz, in her book “The Sabbath World,” writes about the guilt we feel at not being able to manage time. “We blame ourselves. We say that we are too busy to do everything we want to do and see the people we want to see...we don’t get as much done during our non-work hours as we wish we had. We feel as if we are falling short... And though we squander more hours on television and computers, we ask more of ourselves in the hours remaining.” Does any of that ring true for you? We need **Shabbat to Happen** because we need a day to be at peace with **time**, rather than in pursuit of it.

Shabbat allows us to feed our souls real sustenance: our souls are **nourished** by turning inward through meditation, music, and prayer. Our souls are **nurtured** by meaningful moments of encounter with others. Our souls are **strengthened** through moments of awe and transcendence. These are not things for other people; these are moments that happen **for us** when we allow **Shabbat to happen**.

But Shabbat is not just 24 hours of time... we need what happens in that time. Shabbat is not an idea, but it is something you keep, by imbuing it with holiness. At the beginning of the last century, Ahad Ha’am wrote: More than the Jews have kept the Sabbath has the Sabbath kept the Jews. But for us moderns, Judith Shulevitz writes in this century, “sacredness is a relic, the category of ‘holy’ feels like a drawer into which you might toss your odds and end. Holy days, once meant to open up the heavens for a glimpse of time on a cosmic scale, are now holidays, meant for ski trips and preschool parties.” So how do we, who live very secular lives, get comfortable with making time be holy? First by recognizing the enormous power we have. Holiness isn’t something one person can ordain; it takes a community of people, to collectively transform time. But here is the catch: we have to commit ourselves to holy time before time will oblige us by turning holy. And that is the role of our rituals- we turn Shabbat sacred with special food, with setting our tables, beautifying ourselves and our homes, sitting in our special seat in the sanctuary, singing Lecha Dodi. The Sabbath day is our collective act of creation.

Ahad Ha’am’s asserts that if we do this, God will keep us. So I have to ask: Keep us what? Safe? Looking at our history- not hardly. Keep us Jews? There are plenty of Jews who exist but aren’t celebrating the Shabbat. Ahad Ha’am meant that God will keep the Jewish people a people. If we keep the Sabbath holy- for which it takes community, then we will find that the reward is that our community is strong. And when I think about the many challenges we as a Jewish people face around the world right now, I know in my heart that we-and the world-- are in need of everything and anything that can keep Jews a strong, unified, visionary people.

Shabbat has kept the Jews throughout the centuries, because it has given us a way to connect as a community that shares words, rituals, experiences, and heritage. Without Shabbat to bind us to each other, we are a weaker community, and we drift apart from each other. Think about this in your own lives. When you are celebrating Shabbat with others more regularly, do you feel more connected to community? Feel happier inside? When you drift away from Shabbat, is something missing inside you?

So important is Shabbat to the survival of Jewish community that it is the 4th commandment, you shall keep Shabbat and make it holy.

As a community we are drifting from Shabbat, and we are drifting from each other. We are drifting from God, and from sacredness. The language, the rituals, the joy, the

understanding, the spirituality that was a part of our grandfather's and great grandmother's lives is waning and we are hardly aware that these golden webs of connection through the centuries are thinning. If we fail to keep Shabbat, we turn our back on the very vehicle that keeps us community.

And at Temple Beth Torah, community has always been the value we are most proud of. But like Shabbat, community isn't just an idea, it is something to keep, so that we can experience the depth of connectedness that comes with being community. Community is more than our chavurot, our individual friends, the people we feel a kinship with. Martin Buber speaks of Community as being a place where people are no longer "side by side" but "with one another." In community you are not vetted, you are accepted. Just as with Shabbat, where one can stand outside and appreciate the nature of it, but only be transformed through the experience of Shabbat, so it is with community. We can appreciate community, but it is only when you undertake the obligation to being part of community can you feel the belonging, the urge to give of yourself to sustain others, and the ability to receive the blessings. As Alice Munro writes: Only from the inside of the faith is it possible to get any idea of the prize as well as the struggle.

Now is the time for **Shabbat to Happen**. Our community began as a place founded by merchants, which enjoyed the boom of Jewish American life in the 1960s, and the 1990s. Today, for Jewish community to thrive, every one of us must be intentional Jews. So let us be intentional about Shabbat. It is time to meet new people. Create new friendships. Find new teachers, and new role models for Jewish living, become role models to our children and grandchildren. Shabbat is the best vehicle to come inside faith and find the prize. That prize is standing, not shoulder to shoulder, but face to face with one another. Only in community can we make time sacred, rediscover our own authentic Jewish spirituality and find the balance that Shabbat can bring us. It is the antidote to the relentless stress of everyday life. It is the inoculation from the numbness that wears us down, imperceptibly, over time, until all is mundane and we are incapable of awe.

In this community, we are missing each other, and missing Shabbat. And so we as a community are taking 5775 to **make Shabbat Happen**. Our young families are being invited into Shabbat, through a number of weeks where Torah school families will come together to learn, celebrate and rejuvenate on Shabbat rather than on Sundays. And this is my invitation to you to bring Shabbat into your own life, to let the vow you are making right now in your mind to re-embrace Shabbat really carry into your years ahead. For ideas, take home the insert from your program, called "18 Ways to Make Shabbat Happen." Remember Marne? Many young adults like her took action by creating the National Day of Unplugging, a day for people of all faiths to set aside, unplug, and renew their spirits. And when is this Day of Unplugging? Well, it's this March 6-7. But listen to this wisdom: it's from sundown on a Friday to sundown on a Saturday. Hmmm. They re-discovered Shabbat.

Make **Shabbat Happen**. More than the kind of cookies at oneg, the melody you like or don't like in services, the sermon, or the people you know or don't recognize when you walk in to sanctuary, Shabbat is our covenant to keep, because it is what has kept us from generation to generation. It has kept Temple Beth Torah. I invite you to join us this year... in **making Shabbat Happen**.