

Renew, Recharge & Refresh Your Soul

#shabbatshalom

As many of you know, my older children and I spent a month this past summer at a Jewish sleep-away camp, Camp Ramah in the Poconos. And let me tell you, this may be a camp for kids, but **I** had an amazing time. It was not just the sight of seeing my children engaged in a whole host of activities from kayaking, to soccer, basketball, tennis, ropes course, swimming, art, music, singing, prayer, or dancing. It was not just hearing the sounds of Americans and Israelis interact, or the campers using Hebrew slang because they thought Hebrew was cool. It was not just the joy of teaching my students, meeting new friends, and spending quality time with old ones. It was not just the renewed sense of hope that I came away with for the future of the Jewish people, or the daily blessing of living out in nature and spending time overlooking the most majestic and beautiful lake. No- it was so much more than that. I had an amazing **time**. Literally- it was the **time** that was amazing. It was the **time** that was different. It was the **time** that was totally changed.

You see, there were many differences between camp and my regular life at home. One major difference: I had no TV and I had limited-to-no access to my cell phone or the internet. If I wanted to get online, I had to walk clear

across camp- sit in just the right spot outside, hold my phone in just the right way above my head- to see if the spotty wireless was working that moment so I could check e-mail or facebook, or read the latest news.

While it of course took some adjusting, I was blessed, for nearly a month, to be given a renewed appreciation for time. I found time to read six books. I found time to run almost every day. I found time to sleep- I got more sleep every night at camp, than I have had in almost a decade. I found time to sit, relax, and do nothing except for appreciate my surroundings, play catch with my children, stroll around camp with our infant, or sit back and watch our beautiful and energetic children and the other campers as they ran around with their friends. For nearly a month- I was on "camp time." That is to say, time changed, my pace changed, my soul was recharged and I was reminded of the difficulties and challenges that can be found in the way that many of us spend, or rather rush through, our "real time" back in the "real world."

Many of us spend our days trying to "maximize" or time. We indeed make decisions every day to try and make time move faster. We send and receive e-mails at lightning speed (and we are annoyed when a response takes longer than we want). We take the express lane on the parkway. We pay

extra for faster streaming on our internet, and even then we still complain that the connection is too slow, the download isn't happening fast enough, the system is slowing us down! We choose the fastest route on our GPS. We pay extra for expedited shipping and join Amazon "prime" so that our purchases will come within 24 hours instead of two days. And we do all of this to "save time."

So with all of this "saving time," all of the things that move faster than was even conceivable just a decade ago, why do we still feel like we never have enough time in a day? Why do the 168 hours in a week never feel like they are enough? Why do we spend so much time rushing through life that many of us don't get enough sleep, and end up feeling exhausted wondering when we will ever have the time to do those things that we really "want" to do, those things that we *claim* are a priority in our lives? Rabbi Ed Feinstein writes:

*The faster we go, the more empty we feel. The more we "get done", the less it seems we've accomplished. The more contacts we make, the more shallow we become. "Hurry up!" I shout at my son, "Stop playing! Put your shoes on. Let's go!" And then something shocks me into awareness: Is this really what I want? To slam the child into my adult rhythm? To stop playing? **(Feinstein, Pardon Me, Do You Have The Time)***

Maybe we need more "camp time" in our "real time" world. Maybe we need mechanisms to help us slow down, appreciate our lives, appreciate our friends, our families, our most deeply cherished values and beliefs. A time to nurture our faith, and to appreciate the beauty of God's natural creation. A time to relax, to take a nap, to read a book, to share a meal, to go for a walk along the beach. A time where we have nowhere we have to be.

Oh wait a minute- we do have a way of doing this. In fact, we as Jews have the opportunity to reclaim, to transform, to slow down our time every single week. It's no great secret, it's one of the most well known aspects of the Jewish calendar and lifestyle, and it doesn't require taking a month of vacation in the wilderness: it's simple – it's Shabbat!

Again, Rabbi Feinstein:

Here's a gift for the New Year: One day a week -- 25 hours of freedom. To slow down and breathe. To do nothing. To accomplish nothing. Except re-acquainting yourself with the people you love, and the parts of yourself left behind in the rush. To turn your back on the urgent and the pressing, and think about the eternal. To renew your search for what's true, what's beautiful, what's good, what's important. We call it Shabbat. And it's God's gift to you.

*You don't have to be Orthodox to keep Shabbat. You only have to be tired of being tired all the time. Tired of the fatigue -- the drained exhaustion of living on a clock all week long. Tired of the emptiness. Tired of the loneliness. Tired of that feeling that there must be more to life than this. **(Feinstein, Pardon Me, Do You Have The Time)***

How many of you are tired? How many of you are exhausted from the pace of your life? **(RAISE HANDS)** And how many of you are brave enough to actually do something about it? I don't mean talk about it. I don't mean make a Rosh Hashanah resolution that you won't actually follow for more than a week or two. I mean how many of you are bold enough, brave enough, and tired enough- to actually make the time to bring Shabbat into your life.

You don't have to wait until you think you "have time" to bring Shabbat into your life. And you don't have to wait to have an "aha" moment about the gift of Shabbat. Some of you may have read the Oliver Sacks article in the NY Times Sunday review section last month entitled "Sabbath. " Written just weeks before he died, Sacks, a physician, best-selling author, and professor of Neurology at NYU School of Medicine, describes his Orthodox upbringing and the sounds and smells of the Shabbat that filled his childhood. Recalling, quite painfully his journey away from religious observance, he takes the reader on a journey to his more recent renewed interest in the Sabbath credited to his friend and the 2005 Nobel Prize Winner in economics, Robert John -- himself a Sabbath observant Jew. Describing the influence of his late-in-life embrace of Shabbat, Sacks wrote that even as his life was

coming to a close after begin diagnosed with cancer, it was the importance of Shabbat, a practice from which he had long since been estranged, that brought him peace in the final phase of his life. He wrote:

And now, weak, short of breath, my once-firm muscles melted away by cancer, I find my thoughts, increasingly, not on the supernatural or spiritual, but on what is meant by living a good and worthwhile life — achieving a sense of peace within oneself. I find my thoughts drifting to the Sabbath, the day of rest, the seventh day of the week, and perhaps the seventh day of one's life as well, when one can feel that one's work is done, and one may, in good conscience, rest.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/16/opinion/sunday/oliver-sacks-sabbath.html>

It is a touching and beautiful article, and it reminds us that we don't have to wait until the twilight of our lives to appreciate the Sabbath. We don't have to wait to feel as if our work is "done" or at least "done enough." Because we all know that the work of our lives is never done. We are always in process. And yet we need to learn how to pause. The word Shabbat comes from the Hebrew verb *lishbot*, literally meaning "to stop." We need to stop so that we might come to step back, appreciate, and celebrate all that we have and all that we have accomplished; so that we might learn to treasure family, friends, community, tradition, and sense God's presence in our lives.

There are so many people who wander through their lives without an anchor, without something to keep them grounded, something to remind them in a structured, purposeful way that time, and the way that we use our

time, is one of our most precious and limited resources. Do you think you can appreciate time on a regular basis without a weekly, structured, reminder? When was the last time that you took a nap in the middle of the day, had lunch with your entire family with no screens and no distractions, or went for a walk for no reason? When was the last time that you were able to go, for more than an hour (while you were awake!) without using your phone, your computer, checking e-mail, face book, twitter, or sending a text? Honoring time, by embracing it instead of attempting to control it is not something that comes naturally to us. And, as I have mentioned before, our modern-day addiction to technology only makes this even more challenging- as we constantly feel that we have to be logging every minute of our lives.

In a powerful essay about the beauty of Shabbat and the gift that Shabbat offers by way of forcing us to detach and detox from our addiction to all things technology, Gershom Gorenberg wrote the following last month in Hadassah Magazine.

An Unvirtual Day

I don't use screens on Shabbat.... I personally know people who wonder how an educated and skeptical person like me could not only feel bound to a bunch of laws derived from an ancient text—but could even think that those laws apply to devices that hit the market this year.

Let them wonder. For 25 hours each week, everything I see is real, not pixels, and I live in a world of things that can be touched as well as seen and heard. I see the trees on the promenade rather than on my screensaver. Songs are something people sing, not YouTube clips.

For six days, I am a compulsive screentapper. On the seventh I belong to Screentappers Anonymous....

The more we communicate, the less we are in touch.

I cannot cut myself off from all this all the time. Tapped and typed messages are essential to my livelihood and personal life. Besides, like everyone, I live the constant illusion that somehow I will reach through the screen and feel that I am actually *with* someone. I am like a cat trying to get to a bird on the screen.

But I have this as an anchor. I am only connected six days out of the week. On the seventh, in accordance with rules rooted in parchment, every person I talk to is real, is with me and is flesh and blood. I see a living face....

For one day, look away from the screen. Look at people's faces, listen, feel wonder. Shabbat is not a guarantee you will do that. But it is a path. Thank God for that.

Crazy, I know. Unimaginable to some. But Gorenberg is right. We miss so much when we are looking at our screens and not one another. Do you know how many times I see this happening right in this very space, at Bnei Mitzvah celebrations-at the lunch following the service? And no, I am not upset because people are "breaking the rules of Shabbat." I am, however, disappointed that families who don't always have a chance to be together spend more time on their screens than talking to the relatives that they never see and who are sitting right next to them for this family simcha. But

it doesn't have to be that way. We can re-condition ourselves to remember to engage in face-to-face contact as much as we engage with our screens.

Can you imagine spending one entire day each week without technology?

Can you imagine the gift that comes with actually spending time with others, or having a quiet moment to yourself? Can you imagine what your life would be like if you took one day a week, or even a couple of hours over Shabbat, to re-charge yourself instead of merely recharging your phone? On this New Year, I want to present you with a challenge. I want you to give *serious consideration* to making Shabbat a more regular part of your life. You don't have to do it all. You don't have to become completely "shomer Shabbat." You just have to be willing to take some small steps to get started. Let me give you an example of a couple who did just that.

This past year, I had the great honor and privilege of working with two couples going through the process of conversion and marriage. As I do with all of my conversion students as a part of our study of Shabbat, I challenged both couples to pick one weekend to spend 25 hours observing Shabbat in a traditional way. I gave them each a checklist, we talked about some of the "do's" and "don'ts" and went over the basics of ritual and observance. What

impressed me the most is that these young couples, who are certainly not observant in the "traditional sense," nevertheless humored me and wholeheartedly went along with my request. Afterwards, this is what one of the students, Ryan Malc, who grew up Jewish but had never experienced a traditional Shabbat as an adult, had to say about the experience:

I took great meaning from the gift of Shabbat. During this journey, Nicole and I experienced two full Shabbats. Lighting the candles to welcome Shabbat, resting, rejoicing, praying, recharging, and then the next night entering smoothly back into the hustle bustle of our daily lives with the sweet scent of herbs. It was perfect. On the other side of Shabbat, I felt refreshed, spiritually uplifted, and excited for a productive week ahead. Now—perhaps more than ever—having the opportunity to shut down and recharge is essential to our health and overall wellbeing. To that end, Shabbat was there for us and we took full advantage. We look forward to making Shabbat a part of our Jewish lives together.

Ryan and his wife Nicole were brave. They had the courage to dust the ancient practice of Shabbat off of the shelf, where it had lay waiting for them throughout their lives, and in so doing came to realize what a transformative tool it can be when taken seriously.

Jews are often intimidated by Shabbat and think that traditional observance of Shabbat is restrictive. There are so many rules, we say, and they are too hard to follow. But this year, I want to urge you to think differently. The truth is that the rules are meant to be liberating and not constricting. The structure of Shabbat is a gift which gives us the freedom to

live more meaningful, purposeful and intentional lives. And besides, who said that you had to follow every rule all at once. Jewish commitment is a process, not a zero sum game.

So with all of this in mind, I want to ask each of you to take a risk this year by trying to engage with Shabbat on a deeper level.

Here are four ways that you can do that.

1) Join us for Shabbat services, dinner, or lunch- Friday Night or Shabbat Morning. Come early, come late, or just stay for as long as you can. Don't worry about what you are wearing, don't worry about the time . . . just show up. Give yourself the gift of spending Shabbat with your community. Check out our new Shabbat school and feel the energy in the building on Shabbat. Join us for our new "Learn and Burn" monthly program that will enhance our Shabbat mornings by including a learners services, Torah study, and yoga! Come, join us, and re-energize your soul.

2) Next month, we will be launching a monthly "Guess who's coming to Shabbos Dinner" program, encouraging members to sign up to host new and old friends from our community for a Shabbat dinner. The meal could be anything from a traditional Shabbat meal, to pizza and beer by the pool, or Sushi and snacks while sitting around the couch. Each month we need 15 Shabbat dinner hosts, and we'll provide materials, resources, ideas, and even the guests! Stay tuned for more information in the coming weeks!

3) I bought each of you a gift this year. A souvenir. As you leave the sanctuary today, our greeters will be handing out "Shabbat sleeping bags" for your cell phones. **(HOLD ONE UP)** I challenge each one of you to use it-

for one hour, for three hours, or for the entirety of Shabbat. Put the phone away. Recharge yourself in the same way that you recharge your phone- by putting it away. I dare you to try it for a set period of time and see what happens. You will likely miss out on little to nothing- but what you gain will be priceless.

4) Lastly, I want you to consider taking what I like to call "The Shabbat Bucket Challenge." Here's how the challenge goes: every person willing to sign on commits to changing or adding one aspect of Shabbat to one Shabbat a month for a year. Just one small change, one day a month, for 12 months. After Yom Kippur, I will send out a list of twelve different "Shabbat bucket-list" challenges ranging from avoiding money, turning off your phone, avoiding checking your email, sitting down to a family meal, lighting Shabbat candles, or taking a walk with family and friends. Each month you'll try one of these things, to see how it will change your day, your week, your time, your life. And when each challenge Shabbat is over, I will ask you to share with me how it went, how it felt, and what this change meant for you. One new Shabbat Mitzvah, once a month, for twelve months. Who is up for the challenge? Who is brave enough to take the risk?

If you are- here is what I want you to do, right now. Please find one of your Rosh Hashanah tickets, with your name on it, and hold it up in the air so that an usher can come around and collect it. After Rosh Hashanah, I will contact you with further instructions and the details of exactly how this Shabbat challenge will work.

So- four challenges in total:

1. Joining us for any and all synagogue Shabbat activities (shul, Shabbat school, Torah study, yoga, etc..)
2. Sign up to be a host or a guest for Guess Who's Coming to Shabbos
3. Cell phone sleeping bag
4. Take the once a month Shabbat bucket challenge

The New Year is upon us. It is a time for reflection, a time for renewal, a *time* to consider just exactly how we *spend our time* each and every week. Do you wonder where the time went since last Rosh Hashanah? Does time seem to have flown by? Did you do a poor job at prioritizing the way you spend your time once again this year? If the answer to any of these questions is yes- it is time to re-claim your time and your life. It is time to reclaim the beauty and wisdom of the ancient gift of Shabbat.

Shanah Tovah.