



**Congregation Agudat Achim**

Over 120 years of Conservative Judaism



Some of us received Jewish educations with gaps, or we have forgotten or never had the opportunity to learn. Whatever your gaps are, whatever your questions are, our adult education theme this year of “Back to the Basics” is for you! All programming advertised as “Back to the Basics” is open to learners and explorers at all levels, including partners and community members of other faiths or of no faith.

In addition to Living a Jewish Life, Back to the Basics will include a learner’s minyan, an introduction to Jewish history survey course, a course on Jewish lifecycle events, a course on the Jewish calendar, opportunities to learn Hebrew, a course on how to deliver a D’var Torah, and more! Stay tuned for upcoming events and programs.

## **Living a Jewish Life: Rabbi’s November 3-Session Mini-Course 2020**

### **Session 1 (5 November): Shabbat**

#### **Some Texts for Discussion**

##### **I. Sources from the Torah**

###### **Exodus: 20:8-12**

Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work--you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested the seventh day; therefore, the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

###### **Deuteronomy 5:12-15**

Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; you shall not do any work--you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements, so that your male and female servant may rest as you do. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

- What are the differences between the commandments?
- The two commandments include two different explanations for why Shabbat is to be observed. Which reason is more compelling to you?
- According to the two different commandments, what is the purpose of Shabbat?

## II. A Story from the Talmud (BT Shabbat 119a)

The Roman emperor asked Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah: Why do your Sabbath foods have such a fragrant aroma?

R. Joshua answered: We have a certain seasoning called "Sabbath" which we put into the dish, and that gives it its fragrant aroma.

The emperor asked: Give us some.

R. Joshua: For him who keeps the Sabbath, it avails; but for him who does not keep the Sabbath, it will not avail.

## III. Selections from *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel

"He who wants to enter the holiness of the day must first lay down the profanity of clattering commerce, of being yoked to toil. He must go away from the screech of dissonant days, from the nervousness and fury of acquisitiveness and the betrayal in embezzling his own life. He must say farewell to manual work and learn to understand that the world has already been created and will survive without the help of man. Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to Someone Else. Six days a week we seek to dominate the world, on the seventh day we try to dominate the self...

To set apart one day a week for freedom, a day on which we would not use the instruments which have been so easily tuned into weapons of destruction, a day for being with ourselves, a day of detachment from the vulgar, of independence of external obligations, a day in which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization, a day in which we use no money, a day of armistice in the economic struggle with our fellow men and the forces of nature - is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for man's progress than the Sabbath?!

## IV. Ahad Ha'Am, 19th-20th century Zionist leader

"More than Israel has kept the Shabbat, The Shabbat has kept Israel."

## V. *Melakha* Mishna Shabbat 7:2

The primary labors are forty less one:

sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, selecting, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking,

shearing wool, bleaching, hackling, dyeing, spinning, stretching the threads, the making of two meshes, weaving two threads, dividing two threads, tying [knotting] and untying, sewing two stitches, tearing in order to sew two stitches,

capturing a deer, slaughtering, or flaying, or salting it, curing its hide, scraping it [of its hair], cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters [over the erasure],

building, pulling down, extinguishing, kindling, striking with a hammer, [and] carrying out from one domain to another:

these are the forty primary labors less one.

VI. Brad Artson, *It's a Mitzvah!*

As a rabbi in an American suburb, I am involved in helping non-Jews convert to Judaism. After extensive study, the final steps in the process are a ritual immersion in a mikveh, a ritual circumcision for men, and an interview before a board of three rabbis or three knowledgeable Jews to ensure each convert's sincerity and to determine whether each knows enough about Judaism to make an informed choice. One time, as part of the normal questioning, one of the rabbis asked a young woman to name her favorite Jewish ritual or holy day. Without hesitation, she said, "Shabbat." The rabbi then asked her to compare Shabbat to some physical thing and to explain the comparison. After a moment of concentration, she announced that Shabbat is like a vacation cruise.

"Imagine," she said, "taking a twenty-four-hour cruise each week. Once on board, there are no chores because it isn't possible to bring any work on board. There are no ringing phones, no blaring announcements, no driving, no congested freeways, no deadlines. All meals have already been prepared and will be served with elegance. Whatever the passengers desire has already been placed on the ship before it embarked. The vessel sets sail as the travelers gather to sing and to savor a candlelit dinner, embellished with shimmering red wine and a bread so rich it tastes like cake. Surrounded by family and intimate friends, with nowhere to rush off to afterward, each traveler can slowly relish the sumptuous dinner in peace.

"The next morning, as was true the night before, there are no chores, no tasks, no deadlines. So everyone fills his or her time by gathering with other passengers, by talking about matters large and small, the questions and interests that tend to get lost in the shuffle of daily life. They sing a little, meditate a bit, even take some time to study some aspect of Jewish history or religion. People take walks around the deck or play their favorite games together.

After eating another elegant meal for lunch, the passengers retreat to their cabins for a nap or perhaps to read simply for pleasure. At the end of the cruise, as the yacht approaches its berth, everyone gathers on deck to hold a candle-lighting ceremony to mark the end of this restful, lovely time."

## **Ten Pathways toward a New Shabbat**

From: *These Are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life*

by Arthur Green

### **DO:**

1. STAY at home. Spend quality time with family and real friends.
2. CELEBRATE with others: at the table, in the synagogue, with your community or havurah, or with those with whom you can best share in appreciating God's world .
3. STUDY or read something that will edify, challenge, or make you grow.
4. BE alone. Take some time for yourself. Check in with yourself. Review your week. Ask yourself where you are in your life.
5. MARK the beginning and end of this sacred time: lighting candles and kiddush on Friday night and havdalah on Saturday night.

### **DON'T:**

6. Don't do anything you have to do for your work life. This includes obligatory reading, homework for kids (even without writing!), unwanted social obligations and preparing for work as well as doing your job itself.
7. Spend money. Separate completely from the commercial culture that so much surrounds us.
8. Don't conduct business. No calls to the broker, no following up on ads, no paying of bills. It can all wait.
9. Don't travel. Avoid especially commercial places like airports, hotel check-ins, and similar depersonalizing commercial encounters. Stay free of situations in which people are likely to tell you to "have a nice day!" ("Shabbat already is a nice day, thank you!")
10. Don't use commercial or canned video entertainment, including TV and computer. Stay in situations where you can be face-to-face with those around you, rather than facing the all-powerful screen.