



REFORM JUDAISM  
*Shabbat*

*23-24 October 2015*

*Shabbat Lech Lecha*



*Learning*



## Using this Learning pack

Within this pack you'll find resources for learning about Shabbat and about hunger, to help you make learning part of your celebration of RJ Shabbat. Each page is a self-contained unit and ready to use. All you need to do is find a partner or get together a group, print enough copies of the page(s) you choose to study so that everyone can see one, and get learning!

So much of Shabbat revolves around the traditional three meals that we share with family and friends. Despite our feasting, there are too many people in our world who lack enough food to sustain them. The theme of Hunger this RJ Shabbat reminds us to think of those in need and to take action to share our blessings with others.

On each page you will find one or more quotations in black with questions in **green** to help you get a discussion started. These are not the only questions you could ask—please enjoy diving in and asking your own questions to see where a discussion leads.

You could also look up the Torah quotations in any *chumash*; there you will find the original Hebrew, perhaps a different translation, and usually some commentaries that will help you to understand more, dig deeper, and find even more questions.

If you are learning in a group, it may help to nominate someone to lead your study, to help direct your discussions and keep debates focussed on understanding what a text is trying to say. You may find it helpful to read each passage aloud before you begin to discuss it. Remember to make sure that those who might sit quietly on their questions are encouraged to speak too.

Whether you learn in *chavruta* (with a study partner) or around a large noisy table, whether late into Friday night or on a lazy Shabbat afternoon, enjoy it in the knowledge that you are participating in a fundamental part of Jewish life that has been going on for thousands of years.

You might like to begin your learning with this blessing for Torah study:

**Blessed are You, our Living God,  
Sovereign of the Universe, whose  
commandments make us holy, and  
who commands us to devote  
ourselves to the study of Torah.**

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ  
לְעִסּוּק בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

# Shabbat In The Texts

Spend some time exploring these three texts, with a partner or in groups. (If you like, you can also find the Hebrew texts in any *chumash*.)

**What are the different justifications for Shabbat? What is the ‘work’ that God does and doesn’t do? How does it relate to our ‘work’?**

## Genesis 2

<sup>1</sup> The heaven and the earth were finished and all their array. <sup>2</sup> On the seventh day God finished the work that God had been doing and God ceased on the seventh day from all the work that God had done. <sup>3</sup> And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that God had done.

## Exodus 20

<sup>8</sup> Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Eternal your God: you shall not do any work — you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the Eternal made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Eternal blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

**How do these two versions (above and below) of the Ten Commandments differ in their commands about Shabbat? Is it possible to follow only one or the other and still make Shabbat meaningful?**

## Deuteronomy 5

<sup>12</sup> Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Eternal your God has commanded you. <sup>13</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>14</sup> but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Eternal your God; you shall not do any work — you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements, so that your male and female slave may rest as you do. <sup>15</sup> Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Eternal your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Eternal your God has commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

# The Prohibition of Work on Shabbat

In the Torah, Shabbat observance is legislated repeatedly in general terms. Positive specifications include giving rest to one's servants and animals. The types of work prohibited are relatively limited; those mentioned include gathering food, plowing and reaping, kindling a fire, and chopping wood.

## Mishnah Tractate Shabbat 7:2

The main categories of work are forty save one: sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleansing crops, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, washing or beating or dyeing it [wool], spinning, weaving, making two loops, weaving two threads, separating two threads, tying [a knot], loosening [a knot], sewing two stitches, tearing in order to sew two stitches, hunting a gazelle, slaughtering or flaying or salting it [a gazelle] or curing its skin, scraping it or cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters, building, pulling down, putting out a fire, lighting a fire, striking with a hammer, and taking anything from one domain into another. These are the main categories of work: forty save one.

The Rabbis of the Mishnah discussed in more detail what should or should not be done on Shabbat, based on the building of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle).  
**How do they transform into traditional Shabbat observance today?**

In modern times, Reform Jews have reconsidered what 'work' means today, reflecting changes in the world around us. Some traditional categories remain prohibited (such as shopping) while others are permissible depending on their purpose (such as driving a car).

**What are the advantages of redefining 'work'?**

**What are the problems with this approach?**

## Rabbi Dr Tony Bayfield — 'Travel on Shabbat Works for Me,' The JC, 2008

Over the centuries, some of the fences built to protect the Torah have come to make its teachings inaccessible for many... The prohibition against travel [on Shabbat]... has its origins in not breaking off a stick to encourage the horse rather than in expressing opposition to travel per se. Reform Judaism balances the ritual with the other responsibilities of Judaism. We ask not just "do you travel?" but "for what purpose?"

# Shabbat For You

The passage below is used to explain why we have two *challot* on the Shabbat table. **How does it explain this custom?**

## **Exodus 16**

<sup>22</sup> On the sixth day they gathered double the amount of food, two omers for each; and when all the chieftains of the community came and told Moses, <sup>23</sup> he said to them, "This is what the Eternal meant: Tomorrow is a day of rest, a holy sabbath of the Eternal. Bake what you would bake and boil what you would boil; and all that is left put aside to be kept until morning."

**What other reasons do you know for other Shabbat customs, e.g. covering the *challot*, eating *challah* with salt, or lighting two Shabbat candles?**

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In small groups, or individually, try to figure out which factors you would incorporate into Shabbat (and how) to make each of the following present:

- The Mitzvah of *Oneg* (Joy)
- The Mitzvah of *Kedushah* (Holiness)
- The Mitzvah of *Menuchah* (Rest)
- The Mitzvah of Refraining from Work
- The Mitzvah of Preparation
- The Mitzvah of Giving *Tzedaka*
- The Mitzvah of *Hadlakat Nerot* (Shabbat Candle Lighting)
- The Mitzvah of *Kiddush*
- The Mitzvah of Blessing Children
- The Mitzvah of *Hamotzi*
- The Mitzvah of *Birkat Hamazon*
- The Mitzvah of *Hachnasat Orechim* (Hospitality)
- The Mitzvah of Congregational Worship
- The Mitzvah of Three Meals
- The Mitzvah of *Torah* Study

**What does your “To Do” and “Not To Do” list look like for Shabbat? How is it different from the rest of the week? Compare your list with a friend, or make a plan with your family about how you want to continue to enhance your Shabbat practice.**

# Some Ideas Behind Shabbat

Read and discuss the following passages. Do any of these ideas speak to your own personal understanding of Shabbat? Likewise, are there any ideas missing that are important parts of what Shabbat means to you?

## **Midrash Genesis Rabbah 11:8**

Shabbat came before the Holy One; "Ruler of the Universe, every living thing created has its mate, and each day has its companion, except me, the Seventh Day. I am alone!" God answered, "The people of Israel will be your mate." When the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, the Holy One said to them, "Remember what I said to Shabbat: The people of Israel will be your mate. It is with reference to this that My Fourth Commandment for you reads: *'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.'*" (Exodus 20)

## **Jonathan Romain, 'Faith and Practice'**

The object is to preserve the original spirit of the Shabbat command - a day of pleasurable rest and spiritual refreshment which is marked by refraining from normal work. ... Thus there can be divergent expressions of Shabbat observance which are equally valid. Clearly this approach puts much emphasis and responsibility on individuals to observe Shabbat meaningfully - a situation that requires both knowledge and commitment.

## **Rabbi Stephen Pearce – Turning Strictures of Shabbat into Liberations, 1997**

The most serious challenge facing the Jew interested in Shabbat observance is avoiding the dulling impact of repetitive, restrictive ritual and instead finding ways of filling that day with purpose. It is a formidable task because those who find the Sabbath meaningless have forgotten or never knew what to look for, and this lapse of observance is not easily restored. This allegory tells us where to begin our search:

A great pianist was once asked by an admirer, "How do you handle the notes as well as you do?"

The artist replied, "The notes I handle no better than many pianists, but the pauses between the notes -- ah, that is where the art resides!"

Shabbat is the pause between the notes of life. It should be used to create or restore a sense of serenity and sanctity that is absent the rest of the week. Shabbat is more than the restrictive lists of "do nots." It is a list of "dos" that should be designed to create harmony and wholeness.

Once a Jew acknowledges this shift in focus from the restrictive to the liberating, he or she can begin to explore the myriad of ways to make Shabbat an opportunity to enrich life.



# Thou Shalt Not Text?

## **Reboot ([www.rebooters.net](http://www.rebooters.net))—Sabbath Manifesto**

Way back when, God said, “On the seventh day thou shalt rest.” The meaning behind it was simple: Take a break. Call a timeout. Find some balance. Recharge.

Somewhere along the line, however, this mantra for living faded from modern consciousness. The idea of unplugging every seventh day now feels tragically close to impossible. Who has time to take time off? We need eight days a week to get tasks accomplished, not six....

The Ten Principles:

- |                            |                  |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Avoid Technology        | 6. Light Candles |
| 2. Connect With Loved Ones | 7. Drink Wine    |
| 3. Nurture Your Health     | 8. Eat Bread     |
| 4. Get Outside             | 9. Find Silence  |
| 5. Avoid Commerce          | 10. Give Back    |

For large numbers of people it has now become normal to spend all day, every day, hooked up to email, Twitter, Instagram... We are more connected than ever before and yet less fully present in our real lives.

**How does this vision of Shabbat as a ‘Day of Unplugging’ speak to you?**

**How far is it necessary — or possible — to disconnect from technology to observe Shabbat?**

**How would you interpret these Ten Principles in your Shabbat observance?**

**What do these two writers see as the effect(s) of spending one day a week both disconnecting and reconnecting?**

## **Jennifer Bleyer—Powering Down (Tablet, June 2011)**

But our greatest enjoyment was simply being suspended in a day of being rather than doing. Piled on the couch together as a family without the distractions of interactive technology, divorced from the acquisitive and aspirational impulses that drive most of modern life, we understood in the most visceral way how the deprivations one enforces on the Sabbath enable a kind of liberation. Our attention was reserved for each other. The world was overlaid with glittery stillness. We stepped back from the buzzing of our lives and said, “Here we are.” Without being able to articulate exactly what holiness is, we agreed that it felt holy.

## **Judith Shulevitz—How the Sabbath Keeps the Jewish People (Ha’aretz, April 2010)**

It is widely known what *Ahad Ha'am* had to say on the subject: “More than the Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews.”

What he meant goes well beyond Jewish survivalism. He meant that the regulation of time through the laws of Shabbat gave the Jews the chance to regroup in communities at the end of every week, and that that regrouping sustained their Jewish identity.

What Shabbat does to foster such social solidarity is simple. Shabbat coordinates non-work time. It makes people stop working not only for 25 hours a week but for the same 25 hours a week.

# Havdalah — Did you know...?

**The Wine:** The wine is blessed first and as always is a symbol of joy. We take one last sip of the joy of Shabbat as we bid Shabbat goodbye for another week. We sip the wine at the end of the ceremony, not immediately after blessing, although some traditions don't drink it at all.

**The Braided Candle:** Blessed third, it symbolizes the light of Shabbat; the strands of the braid have been interpreted as many things, including the many types of Jews in the world, all of whom are part of one unified people. Not all traditions use a braided candle, however the blessing is over 'lights' not 'light'.

During *Havdalah* we hold our hands up towards the flame in order to use the candle's light, thus using it to work to differentiate it from Shabbat candles. Examining our nails also encourages us to remember (hopefully) to grow in the coming week, as our nails constantly grow. It also shows light and shadow between fingers, reminding us of the distinction between holy and profane.

Blessed are You, our Living God, Sovereign of the universe, who makes distinctions between the holy and the everyday, between light and darkness, between Israel and the other peoples, between the seventh day and the six working days. Blessed are You God, who distinguishes between the holy and the everyday.

**The Spice Box:** Blessed second, the sweet-smelling spices symbolise the sweetness of Shabbat, whose pleasant aroma we breathe in one last time that it might last us through the week to come until we can welcome Shabbat again. Tradition suggests we gain a second soul during Shabbat so the smelling of sweet spices revives us as this soul departs from us until next week. Their use may stem from the custom of bringing incense into a room after a meal, which wouldn't be burnt if it were still Shabbat.

**Between Holy and Ordinary:** The concluding blessing of *Havdalah* praises God who separates between holy and ordinary. With this we distinguish between the ordinary week and the holiness of Shabbat, work and rest, which are both necessary for us to keep in balance through our lives.

**Do any of the distinctions in the blessing (left) surprise you?**



# Hunger: Our Responsibilities

While we build our Shabbat around three meals that we share with family and friends, many people in our world lack enough food to sustain them. The theme of Hunger this RJ Shabbat reminds us of Jewish teachings that command us to be involved and not stand by to watch our fellow human beings' suffering, for each of us is made in God's image.

Below are a number of texts that speak to this issue. Discussing them may help us to plan practical ways to share our blessings with those in need.

## Deuteronomy 16:20

Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Eternal your God is giving you.

## Pirke Avot 1:14

Hillel would also say: If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?

**Why are we told to *pursue* justice, rather than simply to uphold it?**

Judaism commands us to share what we have with others. As it says in *Birkat Hamazon*, Grace After Meals, God provides enough food for all; it is up to us to ensure that it is distributed fairly.

**How might we interpret these instructions in an urban rather than agricultural environment?**

**What does Hillel teach about our obligation to help others?**

## Leviticus 19:9 (see also 23:22)

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest.<sup>10</sup> You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Eternal am your God.

## Psalms 145

<sup>16</sup> You open Your hand and satisfy the needs of all living.

There are reminders in everything from the daily prayers (left) to the Yom Kippur haftarah (right) - **to what actions do they prompt us? Why do we too often ignore them?**

## Isaiah 58

<sup>6</sup> No, this is the fast I desire: ...<sup>7</sup> It is to share your bread with the hungry, and to take the wretched poor into your home.

*Ha Lachma Anya* — This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are in need come and celebrate Passover.

The telling of our story at the Pesach seder begins with an invitation — **what are we doing to make these more than formal/ritual words?**

# Famine in Tanakh (Bible) - 1

Hunger was an all-too frequent reality in Biblical times. Even in times of plenty, the poorest in society could be at risk, and so Torah gives rules for ensuring their well-being.

## **Deuteronomy 15:7**

If, however, there is a needy person among you, one of your kinsmen in any of your settlements in the land that the Eternal your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. <sup>8</sup> Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs.

**Are there any potential problems with this command? How easy is it not to harden your heart when asked for help?**

The Book of Ruth opens with a famine:

## **Ruth 1**

<sup>1</sup> In the days when the chieftains ruled, there was a famine in the land; and a man of Bethlehem in Judah, with his wife and two sons, went to reside in the country of Moab. <sup>2</sup> The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons were named Mahlon and Chilion – Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. They came to the country of Moab and remained there.

<sup>3</sup> Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup> They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth, and they lived there about ten years. <sup>5</sup> Then those two – Mahlon and Chilion – also died; so the woman was left without her two sons and without her husband.

**How does Elimelech respond to the famine? What does the commentary below see as Elimelech's sin? What effect does our own economic hardship have on our willingness to help others? What effect should it have?**

## **Midrash Rabbah, Ruth 1:4**

Why was Elimelech punished? Because he struck despair into the hearts of Israel. He was like a prominent and prosperous man who dwelt in a certain country and the people for that country depended on him and said that if famine should come, he could supply the whole country with food for ten years. So Elimelech was a notable of his town and a leader of the generation. But when the famine came, he said, 'Now all Israel will come knocking at my door for help, each one with a basket.' Therefore he fled from them.

# Famine in Tanakh (Bible) - 2

There is one successful example in Torah of how to handle a famine: Joseph in Egypt. Joseph had direct help from God that we lack, but his story still provides a model for us.

**Whether thinking of mass crop failure on other continents or poverty-induced reliance on food banks in our own country, can you draw any inspiration from this story for how to begin to address hunger in our own time?**

## Genesis 41

<sup>25</sup> And Joseph said to Pharaoh, “Pharaoh’s dreams are one and the same: God has told Pharaoh what God is about to do. <sup>26</sup> The seven healthy cows are seven years, and the seven healthy ears are seven years it is the same dream. <sup>27</sup> The seven lean and ugly cows that followed are seven years, as are also the seven empty ears scorched by the cast wind; they are seven years of famine.”

**How did Joseph read the signs to foresee the approaching famine? What signs should we look for to recognise a looming problem of hunger?**

<sup>41:33</sup> “Accordingly, let Pharaoh find a man of discernment and wisdom, and set him over the land of Egypt. <sup>34</sup> And let Pharaoh take steps to appoint overseers over the land, and organize the land of Egypt in the seven years of plenty. <sup>35</sup> Let all the food of these good years that are coming be gathered, and let the grain be collected under Pharaoh’s authority as food to be stored in the cities. <sup>36</sup> Let that food be a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will come upon the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish in the famine.” ... <sup>47</sup> During the seven years of plenty, the land produced in abundance. <sup>48</sup> And he gathered all the grain of the seven years that the land of Egypt was enjoying, and stored the grain in the cities; he put in each city the grain of the fields around it.

**How did Joseph prepare for the time of famine? How can those of us enjoying years of plenty prepare for the years of famine that others are enduring?**

<sup>41:53</sup> The seven years of abundance that the land of Egypt enjoyed came to an end, <sup>54</sup> and the seven years of famine set in, just as Joseph had foretold. There was famine in all lands, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. <sup>55</sup> And when all the land of Egypt felt the hunger, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph; whatever he tells you, you shall do.” — <sup>56</sup> Accordingly, when the famine became severe in the land of Egypt, Joseph laid open all that was within, and rationed out grain to the Egyptians. The famine, however, spread over the whole world. <sup>57</sup> So all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to procure rations, for the famine had become severe throughout the world.

**When did Joseph begin to help those touched by the famine? How can we ensure that we do not use the distribution of food as a means to gain power over others?**

## Other places to look for inspiration

Your own synagogue is likely to offer programmes either on or leading up to RJ Shabbat, so look out for notices in your community's newsletter or on their website.

For young children:

<http://www.shalomesesame.org/parents-and-educators/shabbat/>

<http://www.torah tots.com/shabbat/shabbat1.htm>

For older children:

<http://blogs.rj.org/blog/2012/08/03/12-ideas-for-shabbat-with-your-teens/>

For help making a discussion of the week's Torah portion part of your Shabbat dinner:

<http://www.reformjudaism.org/torah-study-tips-leading-weekly-family-discussion>

For a wealth of Shabbat-related articles to read and discuss:

<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shabbat/>

A video about unplugging for Shabbat:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LReU9FSeyzc>

For those who like learning in the kitchen:

<http://toriavey.com/how-to/2010/08/challah-bread-part-1-the-blessing-and-the-dough/>

For tunes to some songs to sing at home over Shabbat:

Yom Zeh l'Yisrael [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QG\\_ihn2By0Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QG_ihn2By0Q)

Tzur Mishelo <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-gIN8kARI8>

El Adon <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7sxYkmcuHc>

Yismechu v'malchut'cha <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2ubbShrp1c>

Dror Yikra <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itIG4WU3WUc>

Yedid Nefesh <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgMcv4ZGfRU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrs5xPMTJyU>

Psalm 23 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YBa9AoSvel>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExF9-uFmLa8>

Last but not least, keep an eye on this website—for how-to videos, and much, much more!

<http://www.reformjudaism.org.uk/>