

# Yom Kippur Shabbat

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Medieval Christian Europe produced the miracle of the great cathedrals: vast, complex, awe-inspiring architecture constructed over the course of centuries. Even a Jew from California in the year 2010, stepping into one of those towering wonders, cannot help feeling humbled, fascinated and transported by the soaring space, the cool silence, and the genius of the old guild craftsmen.

Judaism's great cathedrals, according to Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, were not built of stone, glass and mortar. Our great cathedral...is the Sabbath, built of minutes and hours, of words and music, of disciplines and pleasures. Our cathedral was built not in space but in time...and thus was indestructible by armies or by earthquakes.

But in our day and age, our cathedral the Sabbath lies in ruins. Devastated by our migration to America, uprooted from the old world and a thousand years of tradition, the Sabbath for most American Jews is just a memory, a nostalgic scene in *Fiddler on the Roof*, a bit of lingering sadness, an impossibility. Our Jewish cathedral, the Sabbath, has tumbled down, and we stand amid the ruins.

You may be wondering "what ruins? Is this the launch of another capital campaign?"

No. The cathedral of Shabbat was a structure in time, not in space. Twenty-five hours carefully and lovingly carved out of each week. Twenty-five hours of rest, of holiness, of study and singing and love...every seven days. Because the cathedral of the Sabbath was a structure in time, not in space, it was invisible. And within that invisible, spiritual cathedral, our people encountered God...Jewish mystics said it was the feminine God, whom they called the Sabbath Bride.

The cathedral was not visible to the eye, and neither are the ruins. But it is a fact that in the lives of most American Jews today, not all but most, Shabbat been replaced by Saturday. The majestic structure of the traditional Jewish Shabbat has tumbled to the ground.

This is not our fault. Shabbat has not crumbled because we are wicked, or lazy or do not care. On the contrary, we are basically good people, working hard to live responsibly, and we do care deeply about Judaism! But in places like Santa Barbara across the country, for the vast majority of Jews, Shabbat just feels impossible. We know why: Saturday soccer, Saturday birthday parties, Friday night theatre in the high schools and junior highs. And above and beyond all of the specifics, the simple and enormous truth that we are not in Anatevka anymore.

We live in a non-Jewish world. Santa Barbara is not Anatevka. It is not Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. It's not Brooklyn or Pico Robertson. We live in a non-Jewish world, but Shabbat always emerged as the supreme expression of a Jewish world. Shabbat is a social construct, a cultural and spiritual reality created by a community. How many of us have the stubborn, radical self-sufficiency to inhabit a social construct all alone, without community? I know I don't.

And yet. Without Shabbat, we cannot be Jewish. Look at the Torah: Shabbat is the culmination of, the purpose for, the creation of the world. Look at the Ten

Commandments: Shabbat is just as fundamental as “Thou shalt not murder” and “Honor thy father and thy mother.” Shabbat is the central promise between God and the Jewish people. We stand amid the ruins of the Sabbath and it feels impossible to rebuild it. But our oldest and best wisdom tells us that without Shabbat, Judaism and the Jewish people perish. What should we do?

Tonight is not only Yom Kippur. It is also Shabbat. Shabbat Shalom!

We need to begin, I think, by forgetting about the cathedral. That towering, majestic, complex Shabbat was beautiful, still is beautiful today in Jerusalem and even in Pico Robertson! But for us...it's gone. In its place, let us erect a humble but nonetheless sacred structure. Within the ruins of the old cathedral, let us raise up a new Shabbat of the simplest, most elemental structure. Four poles and a cover. Where the Sabbath cathedral once stood, we can raise up a beautiful Shabbat wedding canopy.

What is possible here in Santa Barbara? I mean realistically. What could we here tonight agree to? Are there four poles, four slim but sturdy pillars of Shabbat, that we could all share? Not just the rabbis, the cantor and the educator and the Jews from orthodox backgrounds who know all the prayers and grew up with all the rituals, but all of us...soccer moms and Maravilla residents, interfaith couples, Bnai Brith Lodge members and Youth group teenagers. What might be four poles of a Shabbat chuppah, under which we all could gather week after week?

It will not be a traditional Jewish Shabbat. A broadly accepted Shabbat for Santa Barbara must make room for soccer and little league, for ballet and horseback riding, for driving, for the movies, for the theatre, for the Farmers Market...and even for work.

Can we construct a Shabbat canopy for our community that makes room for all of those activities and yet still is even remotely recognizable as a Jewish Shabbat? For many years, I would have said “no.” But tonight I say yes. We can construct a simple and humble Shabbat for Santa Barbara that we can all live with, and which will restore our covenant with God, and with our people.

Here we go.

You will need: A tablecloth...white would be nice but not necessary. A favorite food. A nice shirt or dress...again, white would be nice. Candlesticks and a box of candles. A nice cup and some wine or grapejuice.

Some of these you probably already have. For the rest, talk to Jessica Glick, our gift shop czarina.

Tonight when you return home, look at your tablecloths and pick one to be your Shabbat tablecloth. Before going to bed, put it out on your dining room table and leave it there until three stars are visible tomorrow night. Next week on Friday afternoon, before sundown, lay your Shabbat tablecloth out again and leave it there for 25 hours, until three stars are visible Saturday night. Do it again each week on Friday afternoon, for the rest of your life. That tablecloth will be your constant reminder, all day long every Saturday, whatever else you are doing, that it is Shabbat...a silent but powerful witness to the sacred day. At some important moment, after many years, you might pass that tablecloth on to your son or daughter, or a grandchild. It could easily become their most treasured possession. One of them might use it for their wedding canopy. I would. The Shabbat tablecloth will be our first humble, do-able, but powerful step in rebuilding Shabbat in our community. And when you visit your friends' house in Saturday afternoon, to drop

your kid off or to play mah-jongg, and you see their Shabbat tablecloth out on the table....wish them Shabbat Shalom.

Next, think of some edible treat that you love. A few that pop into my mind are Judy Meisel's chocolate chips meringues, Robin Himovitz's chocolate chip cookies, Judy Karin's killer brownies....you may be detecting a pattern. It doesn't need to be chocolate! In the Talmud, the Shabbat treat is called *oneg*, and Rav Yehuda said in the name of his teacher Rav "*oneg* is a dish of beets, large fish and heads of garlic" and Rabbi Papa declared that his *oneg* was fish hash. But the essential thing is to not eat it on any day of the week except Shabbat. Impose that restriction on yourself....you can! And then eat it on Shabbat and declare in Hebrew or in English "lichvod Shabbat," "To honor the Sabbath!" By the way, when considering which food you want to designate as your "oneg Shabbat" treat, you might want to talk with Blake and Ruth Johnson about their very special Shabbatinis.

Can we agree to these two things...all of us here tonight? A Shabbat tablecloth in every house, every Shabbat from sundown Friday to three stars on Saturday night, and one treat...to be picked by each person...which they will only eat on Shabbat accompanied by the words "To honor the Sabbath!" If we could, I think we would begin to feel the presence of Shabbat again in our city.

If those two are acceptable, we need just two more. Pick an article of clothing, a nice shirt or dress that you love, that really makes you feel good, and designate it as your Shabbat garment. Wear it next week on Shabbat and then never wear it on a week-day. If you enjoy shopping, go buy your Shabbat garment this week...to be worn only on Friday night or Saturday. My own custom is to only wear white shirts on Shabbat, and never on any other day of the week. Our Jewish summer camps use this trick to teach the kids that it is Shabbat all day long; and the kids love it. Could you wear a white shirt on the sidelines of the soccer field or a white dress at the Farmers Market? Why not? And when you see your friend wearing his or her white shirt on Saturday, don't say "I see you drank the kool-aid." Just say "Shabbat Shalom."

Now, fourth and last. Candles, wine and challah. A simple ritual, to be conducted with honesty and without show or pretense. If you are comfortable with the blessing, by all means speak it or sing it. But if you have never said the blessing before, don't even try saying it for the first month. Just light your candles and take a minute to stop. To look and to feel. With that gesture you have brought beauty and holiness into your home. Do that every week for a month. At the end of that month, decide if you would like to add the blessing....or a blessing fragment, in English or in Hebrew. Take your nice cup....maybe you have a kiddush cup tucked away somewhere, or choose to buy one, and fill it with wine or grape juice, and take a sip with Shabbat in mind. And finally the loaf of challah.

The blessings are not difficult to pronounce, but to say a few words of authentic prayer, if one has never prayed before, might well be impossible. Forget the blessings; you can always add them later. Begin with the gesture. The candles. The wine. The bread. Without the blessings, they might take exactly one long, profoundly meaningful minute. At the end say "Shabbat Shalom."

That's all. A Shabbat tablecloth, a Shabbat delicacy, a Shabbat garment, and the simplest possible Shabbat ritual of candles, wine and challah. A humble beginning. We

don't need a cathedral...a simple structure will do. But we do need that. A new Shabbat covenant, one to which we all can say "yes." Will you join me? Shabbat Shalom.