

Notes From The Cantor – November, 2006

“Why I Need Shabbat In My Life?”

By

Cantor Florence F. Merel

I need Shabbat in my life so that I remember to pause and step back from the hectic pace of everyday life. Shabbat is like a weekly mini vacation that gives me the permission to retreat from my normal routines and to refresh my soul. As I slow down my racing mind and body, there is a clearing for me to see things in a new light and to be more open and present to my experiences. Just as I prepare for a vacation, I prepare for Shabbat by making sure that I have Challah and wine and that my table is set in the dining room and not the kitchen. I prepare by knowing, that even when I am not leading services, I am celebrating Shabbat at home with my family.

I prepare by trying to complete tasks such as banking, laundry, and food shopping before Shabbat begins. The rituals of lighting the Shabbat candles, chanting the Kiddush, and the Motzi remind me that this is sacred time set aside. These rituals remind me of creation, the covenant between God and the Jewish people, and of my own connection to God. These rituals also remind me to let go of the past week, and all the ups and downs of that week.

Singing “the V’shamru” prayer reminds us to observe Shabbat. “The people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath in every generation as a covenant for all time. It is a sign between Me and the people of Israel, for in six days God made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day God rested and was refreshed/rested from His labors.” The last Hebrew word of this prayer – “vayinafash” comes from the Hebrew root for soul. We are not told what God did to refresh His soul. It is up to us to find the ways to refresh our souls and reap the rewards of observing Shabbat. For me it is spending time with my family - walking in a park, biking on country roads, reading a book, going to a movie, or sharing a meal with friends. It is also praying with others as part of a supportive and caring community. Observing Shabbat does not have to be an all or nothing proposition, but it does take planning and commitment to set sacred time aside. Reform Judaism gives you the freedom to create how you want to do this. As Rabbi Gershon mentioned in his High Holy Day sermon, observing Shabbat is a path to living a life without regret. In the year ahead, how are you going to refresh your soul and begin to live a life without regret?