

## **Kabbalat Shabbat; A Transformative Experience**

Paul Schreiber

M.A. Project, Academy for Jewish Religion

Advisor: Kaya Stern-Kaufman

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"More than Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews."

- Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginsberg, poet, philosopher, 1856-1927)

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## AN INTRODUCTION

A day of rest. Sounds promising, necessary, healthy. In today's modern world, it's easy to relegate this concept of rest to simply that of a weekend. For many in the modern world, we work five days a week and then with a loud and exuberant voice we exclaim, "Thank God it's Friday!" And it's at that moment that a case could be made that we do indeed enter a day of rest, or in this case two days of rest. Saturday and Sunday, two days to lounge around the house, go to the beach, take long naps in a hammock, and just generally shut off from the Monday through Friday grind that many find ourselves a part of. So is this the day of rest spoken of in our Torah? Some would absolutely reply yes. A day free from the 9 to 5 grind, a day to simply do what we desire without anyone telling us what we must do or requiring us to adhere to a predetermined schedule.

In the Jewish religion, this day of rest goes much deeper than just avoiding work and/or relaxing on the couch. It is rooted in the idea that since God ceased from creating on the seventh day, so too we should cease from creating. This is not easy for us as we are conditioned to be on the move and constantly look for projects to complete. Here lies the beauty of Shabbat, the idea that it is not only acceptable, but also mandated, that one should abstain from all activities that would constitute the act of creating. Of course, within the many sects of Judaism that are a variety of methods based on traditions and customs in which to live out the Shabbat experience. This paper will explore ways in which to thoroughly engage and immerse the participants in a Shabbat experience in such a way that they will leave transformed and in-tune with themselves much more than before they began this experience. This is the transformative power of

Shabbat and personal transformation is the goal. It can occur as all will be gathered around the dinner table which acts as a type of altar in which holiness can be expressed. This most special dinner is accompanied by teachings, song, various activities and rituals, all that will personalize this experience for each participant.

There is, in Judaism, the concept of mikdash me'at, a small temple. According to the Talmud, God will dwell in the holy spaces we create, for they are a Temple in miniature.<sup>1</sup> The prophet Ezekiel addresses this very concept; Now it came to pass as I was prophesying, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died, and I fell on my face and cried out with a loud voice, and I said, "Alas, O Lord God, are You making a complete end to the remnant of Israel?" Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: "Son of man! Your brethren, your brethren, your kinsmen and the entire house of Israel, all of it, to whom the dwellers of Jerusalem said, 'Distance yourselves from the Lord; to us has the land been given for an inheritance.' Therefore, say; So said the Lord God: Although I have removed them far off among the nations and although I have scattered them in the lands, I have become for them a minor sanctuary (mikdash me'at) in the lands where they have come.<sup>2</sup> This then, the very idea that the gathering is being held in a mikdash me'at, should permeate the minds of each and every participant as they move through this Shabbat dinner gathering.

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<sup>1</sup> Megilah 29a, as cited in <https://www.thejc.com/judaism/jewish-words/mikdash-me-at-1.15658>

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 11:16.

In order to provide an in-depth, personally meaningful Kabbalat Shabbat dinner and gathering, the following study will consist of a series of seven sessions that will allow the participant to enter into this mysterious concept rooted in the Torah and one of the Ten Commandments; a concept that has maintained the Jewish people for thousands of years. It is indeed said that “More than Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews.”<sup>3</sup> Each one of the seven sessions will guide the participant through an exploration of this day and how one might enter in to not only take part in the observance, but rather, experience this idea and make it real and personal. There is simply no shortage of books and videos on the Sabbath, or Shabbat as it is more commonly referred to in Jewish circles, but if all one does is read about this concept, one would be hard-pressed to understand it fully. Esther Jungreis writes, “How do I describe Shabbos? How do I put the awesome sanctity of Shabbos on paper? The more I think about it, the more I realize that Shabbos cannot be written about, it must be lived. It must be experienced.”<sup>4</sup>

The concept of welcoming the Sabbath is found in the Talmud (Shabbat 119a) when the Sages dressed in their finest clothes would venture out to greet the arrival of Shabbat on Friday evening. As the Talmud states, Rabbi Hanina would wrap himself in his garment and stand at nightfall on Shabbat eve, and say: Come and we will go out to greet Shabbat the queen. Rabbi Yannai put on his garment on Shabbat eve and said: Enter, O bride. Enter, O bride. The Gemara relates: Rabba bar Rav Huna

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<sup>3</sup> Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginsberg, poet, philosopher, 1856-1927)

<sup>4</sup> Jungreis, Esther. *The Committed Life: Principles for Good Living from Our Timeless Past*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 275.

happened to come to the house of Rabba bar Rav Nahman. They brought before him three se'a of oiled biscuits. He said to them: Did you know I was coming and prepared all of this in my honor? They said to him: Are you more important to us than Shabbat? The biscuits were prepared in deference to Shabbat.<sup>5</sup>

To encourage such a sense of deference, these instructional materials have been designed to teach and guide the students through a complete Kabbalat Shabbat/Friday night dinner experience. The following syllabus has been developed as a seven-week course consisting of seven stand-alone sessions. Each of the seven class meetings is dedicated to one of these sessions. The teacher will present the materials in such a way as to equip the students with the necessary skills in order to lead a Kabbalat Shabbat/Friday night dinner experience on their own.

Each of the seven sessions will include an overview, background information, a choice of two to three activities, a hands-on, interactive ritual, and specific materials and preparation for each activity and ritual. Additionally, and of vital import, is the fact that each and every activity and ritual will be prefaced with the kavanah, the intended purpose of that activity and ritual. Notably, the first activity will always consist of cards with questions relating to the specific session. It is of great importance that during this questioning activity, there is no "right" answer. Each participant's attempt to answer a question should be honored and validated so that the participants can feel that they are indeed in a safe place where true exploration can occur. Every activity and ritual will

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<sup>5</sup> Talmud Shabbat 119a

include the kavanah, the intention, for that specific activity/ritual. The purpose of including the kavanah is so the facilitator can be sure that the focus of the activity supports the intention. It can be all too easy for an activity to stray off course and lead the participants in an area not intended. By keeping the focus on the kavanah, the facilitator, and the participants, can maintain the proper perspective and hopefully, reap the intended benefits. Finally, and although not specifically noted in the syllabus, every activity should culminate with a time for participant reflection. This should last no more than 5 minutes and its purpose is to offer specific thoughts and feelings regarding the activity.

Beginning with Session I, the instructor will lead the group through an understanding of the basics of the Sabbath, including its origin, basic components and traditional understandings. The activities in this session will be focused on the personal experiences of each individual member of the gathering. This is vitally important as one of the requirements of this gathering is that the journey, although taken with the group, must be a highly personal experience.

In Session II, instructions on preparation are presented in order to give the mind and body the proper intention, also known as kavanah, for the experience to occur in the most sanctified manner.

Sessions III through V will explore the prayers that are traditionally recited at the onset of the Sabbath. By delving into these prayers, mostly from the book of Psalms, a deep



understanding of the words and intent of each psalm will be explored and personalized using in-depth discussions and rituals that will, ideally, personalize each psalm and allow the participant to enter into the psalm with their own personal understanding.

Session VI will focus on the actual mechanics of the dinner table experience by exploring each of the elements that transform the dinner table into a holy altar. Much like the holy work that was conducted by the Levitical priests on the altar in the Jerusalem Temple, so too, it is taught that the Friday night dinner table is also a sacred space for holy work.

Finally, Session VII will reflect upon the overall experience of the evening, including its transformative possibilities, the effect on the home, as well as the effect on each of the participants.

On a final note, it is important that the facilitator move through the syllabus in the order presented, for by doing so, each participant will experience a Friday night Shabbat observance in a most special and personal manner. To be sure, there is no “one way” to experience or observe this special day. The syllabus presented offers just one approach to help bring meaning and a personal connection to the Sabbath for each and every participant.

## **SESSION I: OVERVIEW OF SHABBAT**

- Conduct a conceptual analysis on “a day of rest”
- Thoughts, views, and past experiences
- The origin of, and Torah’s perspective on, the Shabbat
- Exploring the idea behind, “A Taste of the World to Come”

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** Shabbat is a truly remarkable concept in which the Jewish people observe a day of rest in the rush of activity that engulfs the other six days of the week. The Gemara says that G-d describes Shabbat as “a wonderful gift in My treasure house.”<sup>6</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel referred to Shabbat, the seventh day, as a palace in time with a kingdom for all. It is not a date but an atmosphere.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps what Heschel meant was that Shabbat, as much as possible, is a time when time stands still, when we feel timelessness or eternity more than on the other days. For one entire day — from sundown Friday evening to nightfall Saturday night — we are given the opportunity to stop, to refrain from all creative works and to transcend the worries and struggles that exist in our daily lives. In its place, in this set apart time, we can enjoy the tranquility of a day of rest mandated by the Divine.

In the Jewish tradition, it is not so much that creation happened as a one time event but rather, it is an ongoing process; a cycle in which God is creating our world continually and then resting. So too we are to emulate that cycle. When we set apart a day of rest for ourselves, we are, in essence, aligning ourselves with the divine cycle of creation. By doing so we bring purpose, we bring holiness, we bring wholeness into our lives. We enter this time determined to refrain from the concept of work.

This can be a confusing concept as there are many definitions for the “work.” In the Torah, work is referred to as melachah, "creative work." In order to rightly determine

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<sup>6</sup> Talmud Shabbat 10b, as cited in <https://www.kosher.com/lifestyle/shabbat-and-awe-heaven-yiras-shamayim-581>

<sup>7</sup> Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Sabbath*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 21

what precisely constitutes creative work, our sages turn to the Mishkan — the portable sanctuary built in the Sinai Desert by the people of Israel as a "dwelling" for the Divine Presence. God commands that the work of building the Mishkan should cease on Shabbat. The Talmud specifies 39 specific categories of work.<sup>8</sup> They are derived from the fact that the Torah juxtaposes the commandment to cease work on Shabbat with its detailed instructions on how to build the Mishkan, and the preparation of its components.<sup>9</sup> Whatever work was done in the creation of the Mishkan is the work delineated as prohibited on Shabbat. Scores of books have been written on the 39 Melachot, the 39 categories of work, and it's no wonder since the injunction to refrain from work is emphatically commanded. Without clear examples of activities that constitute "work", it would be very easy to violate this concept many times over. In our tradition, the Mishkan, is actually seen as a microcosm of creation, thus any work done for the building of the Mishkan is directly related to the creation of the world. Refraining and resting from those categories of work is thereby connected to G-d's resting from the act of creation. The main idea is that we do not engage in any sort of behavior that would be considered affecting the world by making a change and/or creating something new. As Heschel states, the Sabbath itself is a palace we build, a sanctuary in time.<sup>10</sup>

Regardless of what sect of Judaism one adheres to and how one decides to define work, one thing is certain. The day set aside for rest should be sanctified, should be

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<sup>8</sup> Tractate Shabbat 7:2

<sup>9</sup> Exodus 31 and 35.

<sup>10</sup> Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Sabbath*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 14-15

observed in a manner different from all the other days of the week. By entering Shabbat in a special, holy manner on Friday night, one can't help but feel that the day they are entering is most certainly unique. The purpose behind setting apart this day is explained by Jungreis; On Shabbos we enter a different time zone. We are propelled into another planet in which the usual earthly concerns vanish. On Shabbos, God endows us with an added soul and allows us to soar to spiritual heights.<sup>11</sup>

One need not look very far in the Torah for this idea of “a day set apart”. In the very beginning of our Bible, in what is commonly referred to as the creation story, we find the origins of Shabbat. In the second chapter of the book of Genesis we find a most familiar set of verses; Completed now were heaven and earth and all their host. On the seventh day, God had completed the work that had been done, ceasing then on the seventh day from all the work that [God] had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, and ceased from all the creative work that God [had chosen] to do.<sup>12</sup>

From this, then, we see that the day is indeed holy, kadosh, and thus should be deliberately set apart. It is interesting to note that the very first time we come across the Hebrew word for holy, kadosh, is when referring to this seventh day, the Shabbat.<sup>13</sup> This would suggest that this day of rest is indeed much more than simply a day to refrain from physical activities. Our tradition enthusiastically claims, Shabbat is “a taste

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<sup>11</sup> Jungreis, Esther. *The Committed Life: Principles for Good Living from Our Timeless Past*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 275.

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 2:1-3

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 2:3

of Olam Haba, the world to come.<sup>14</sup> Amongst its many definitions in Jewish theology, Olam Haba can refer to either “the world after death” or the new creation or restoration of the world that is to follow the messianic era. Whatever the interpretation of Olam Haba, there is the thought that it represents the end of uncertainty, misery, and strife. The connection is that one who lives Shabbat correctly can actually taste the next world, a world of perfected balance, a return to the Garden of Eden.

## **SESSION I: Overview of Shabbat**

### **ACTIVITY #1**

**KAVANAH:** To gain familiarity with each of the participants of the Shabbat dinner experience; to learn about each other’s Jewish experience. This is an extremely important activity as it offers insight into each participant’s level of Jewish experience and thus creates a sense of camaraderie amongst the group. This will have a profound effect as this journey is taken by all involved.

**ACTIVITY:** We begin by asking participants to share their definition of “a day of rest”. Invite participants to explore ways they have attempted, if at all, to experience Shabbat. Participants share photos of them and/or their family demonstrating any sort of Shabbat and/or religiously Jewish observance. These can come from a prior request to bring photos that accompanied the invite.

**PREP:** None

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<sup>14</sup> Talmud Brachot 57a, as cited in <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/into-the-depths-of-shabbos-a-taste-of-the-world-to-come-vayakhel/>

## **SESSION I: Overview of Shabbat**

### **ACTIVITY #2**

**KAVANAH:** To develop a deep, yet personal understanding of the concept of “the world to come” thus making this mysterious concept a bit more understandable and relevant for each participant.

**ACTIVITY:** Begin by showing a short video from Fiddler on the Roof. Then, discuss all the nuances that were observed as the family prepared for Shabbat.<sup>15</sup>

**PREP:** DVD of movie or video device w/internet connection

## **SESSION I: Overview of Shabbat**

### **ACTIVITY #3:**

**KAVANAH:** To gain an appreciation for the uniqueness of this day and to witness the hurried, excited and anticipatory emotions of Tevye’s family as they prepare for Shabbat and the lighting of the Shabbat candles.

**ACTIVITY:** Recalling the past week, ask participants to share an event that, if it occurred in “the world to come”, may have turned out differently. Allow for others to offer their ideas to that same event.

**PREP:** None

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<sup>15</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3-AgF\\_fU9s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3-AgF_fU9s)

## SESSION I: Overview of Shabbat

### RITUAL

**KAVANAH:** To gain an appreciation of what it truly means to stop the creative process and to value the act of doing nothing. Although this may sound easy, it is monumentally difficult for most people to comprehend and/or experience. This is an activity that can be a part of every Friday night experience as the participants will often achieve the intended goal only after many attempts.

**RITUAL:** While sitting in a circle, begin a guided meditation asking all participants to empty their minds completely. The goal for this ritual is to cease from all creative works of the mind; to let go of all expectations, chores, responsibilities, to-do lists, etc. Explore this arena of nothingness by using the following guided mediation script:

*“Sit down and do nothing. That’s it. Sit down and quite intentionally do nothing at all. Now keep on doing it.* However, most people need a little more instruction than that, so let’s unpack it a bit. Even though the meditation is called Do Nothing, you’re actually doing a little tiny bit of something: you’re paying attention to the feeling of doing something. It doesn’t matter where your mind goes. It can go to all sorts of distraction, and that’s fine. You are not trying to meditate, focus, or concentrate in any way. You’re simply noticing when you feel that you’re doing something and letting go of that. If it feels like you’re getting caught up in a thought, let go of that. Don’t just sit there following thoughts, planning, evaluating, etc. That is considered to be doing something. Just let go of doing that. If it feels like you’re getting caught up in an emotion, let go of that. If it feels like you’re getting caught up in meditating, let go of that. If it feels like you’re struggling to let go, let go of that. If it feels like you are



constricting or tightening in your body, your emotions, or your mind, let go of that. Just keep relaxing away from all tightening, constriction, or sense that you're doing anything."<sup>16</sup>

**PREP:** Meditation script

**END OF SESSION I**

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<sup>16</sup> Deconstructing Yourself. Do Nothing Meditation. Michael W. Taft. 2017 <https://deconstructingyourself.com/do-nothing-meditation.html>

## **SESSION II: PREPARATION FOR SHABBAT**

- Mindset and the importance of Kavanah
- Body preparation
- Creating sacred space for prayer

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** How does one adequately prepare for Shabbat? As with any endeavor of a serious nature, understanding its purpose is often critical for its success. Each participant should ask of themselves, what is their true intention for being a part of this experience? The Hebrew word for this concept is *kavanah* and it has multiple meanings ranging from direction, intention, and purpose. In its simplest meaning, it refers to focusing the mind on the manner in which a religious act is performed, thus avoiding the possibility of the performance turning into a rote, mechanical action. Although mostly associated with the manner in which one approaches prayer with focus and a heart-felt desire for connection, the concept of *kavanah* applies to all mitzvot. So important is this idea, that tradition desires and encourages *kavanah* for the performance of any given mitzvah.

There is a curious ruling in the mishnah that if someone happens to be passing by a synagogue at the time that the shofar was blown on Rosh Hashanah, they do not fulfill the mitzvah of shofar because they heard it only incidentally, not purposefully.<sup>17</sup> In other words, there was no real intention. The listener, by way of simple happenstance, found himself an area that was filled with the sound of the shofar. The Shulchan Aruch asserts that, although some authorities contend that proper intention is not necessary for the performance of any given mitzvot, this view is incorrect and that proper *kavanah* is indeed required.<sup>18</sup> In the classic work, *God in Search of Man*, Abraham Joshua Heschel explains that performing a mitzvah with improper *kavanah* (in some cases)

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<sup>17</sup> Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 3:7, as cited in <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/kavvanah-intention/>

<sup>18</sup> Shulchan Aruch, *Orah Hayyim* 60:4, as cited in <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/kavvanah-intention/>

invalidates the act.<sup>19</sup> He goes on to say that transformation of the soul is the purpose of Jewish practice. This “transformation of the soul” is precisely the kavanah, and thus the goal, of this Friday night experience.

In Jewish tradition, many will go to the mikvah, a ritual bath, on Friday afternoon prior to the Shabbat dinner. Whereas in our society we think of bathing as an act to cleanse the body, this type of bathing is done to cleanse the soul. During this mikvah experience, one can take time to reflect on the past week, to think about the week ahead, or to just simply relax while finding one’s own personal space. Some people choose to meditate, or study a piece of Torah or Talmud quietly before Shabbat. Whatever one chooses to do, the idea is to physically and mentally prepare for the Friday night Shabbat experience. The more time spent in preparation will most certainly equate to a more intense Shabbat experience. Bathing, cleaning the home, putting on special clothing, decorating the home, and meditation are just a few examples of how one may prepare prior to the actual gathering.

The home itself should be free from clutter, not just physical but also audible. The creation story in the book of Genesis, although beginning in a state of chaos, is a story of order and so too the house should be in order. This is not to say that if there is clutter in the home a positive Shabbat experience cannot be attained, but rather, the more orderly the space the more free the mind is to explore spiritual matters void of distractions. Creating an orderly space for Shabbat is monumentally important but

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<sup>19</sup> Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *God in Search of Man*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955). p. 318.

what is actually occurring in that physical space is just as important. If there is more than one person in the home, the question arises as to whether or not everyone is involved in this experience or are there bodies moving about disinterested and/or oblivious to what is being attempted. Worse than this is the possibility that those not a part of the experience can actually detract from the experience. This can certainly cause great distraction and will be a blockade to any real significant experience. This is not to say that the Shabbat experience should not be attempted if other activities are happening in the home, however if it all possible, these distraction should be kept to a minimum and all those in the home should be encouraged to play a part in this experience. If the home is divided physically and emotionally, so too will be the experience.<sup>20</sup>

## **SESSION II: Preparation for Shabbat**

### **ACTIVITY #1**

**KAVANAH:** To demonstrate artistic expression by encouraging each participant to create a personal offering based upon their own unique talent that they alone bring to the group. The created piece of artwork acts as a sort of personal offering; bringing something unique to the “altar”.

**ACTIVITY:** Have students create a piece of artwork depicting Shabbat. It can be in the form of a poem, song, drawing, object, etc. They can choose to share their work with others, explaining the connection to Shabbat.

**PREP:** Art supplies

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<sup>20</sup> Due to the COVID-19 pandemic we are currently experiencing, alternative methods of gathering are constantly being developed. In creating sacred space for prayer, if we are unable to physically gather in person, consider how these exercises can be conducted virtually with each participant steaming from their home in a specifically created sacred space.

## **SESSION II: Preparation for Shabbat**

### **ACTIVITY #2**

**KAVANAH:** To explore opportunities for engaging our physical and emotional being. All too often, we succumb to the misfortune of simply reading about a given practice without true engagement. This activity will enable those who want a deeper connection to share their ideas in creative and expressive ways.

**ACTIVITY:** Invite participants to explore ways to physically and/or emotionally prepare for the Friday night Shabbat experience. This can be played out in a manner similar to charades, in which the other participants are to guess the actual preparation. This is a more light-hearted activity to bring some informality and laughter to the group experience. As such, participants should be encouraged to “let loose” and explore their dramatic side by acting out various Shabbat-related activities.

**PREP:** Open space for participants to physically act out a chosen Shabbat preparation scenario.

## **SESSION II: Preparation for Shabbat**

### **RITUAL**

**KAVANAH:** To develop our connection with the natural world and the idea that all of creation experiences Shabbat and sings the Creator’s praise.

**RITUAL:** Take a silent nature walk through a wilderness area or any outdoor space. Each participant will be assigned a role that is to be played out during the walk. Example of one such role includes a participant being assigned the “Keeper of the Trees.” While standing next to the tree, this person explains to the group how the tree

is preparing for Shabbat. This process continues with other roles such as: Keeper of the Grasses, Keeper of the Flowers, Keeper of the Sky, etc. A song that can be chosen and sung immediately following this ritual is “Mizmor Shir” by Reb Shlomo Carlebach, z”l. The lyrics speak of the idea that nature itself sings the song of Shabbat.

**Lyrics for Mizmor Shir:**

Mizmor Mizmor shir, shir l'yom ha Shabbos

The whole world is waiting to sing the song of Shabbos

And I am also waiting to sing the song of Shabbos

I am also waiting to sing the song of Shabbos

The flowers and the trees sing the song of Shabbos

The valleys and the mountains sing the song of Shabbos

The stars in the sky sing the song Shabbos

The angels in heaven sing the song of Shabbos

Stop all this hatred sing the song of Shabbos

Love one another, sing the sing of Shabbos<sup>21</sup>

**PREP:** Outside area consisting of trees, grass, flowers, etc. Lyric sheet for Mizmor Shir.

**END OF SESSION II**

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<sup>21</sup> Carlebach, Shlomo. *Mizmor Shir*. I Heard the Wall Singing Volume 2. The Greater Recording Company. 1968

### **SESSION III: TIER I; IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION OF PRAYERS**

- Psalm 95
- Psalm 96
- Psalm 97



**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** As the focus now turns to the more traditional pieces of liturgy recited during a Kabbalat Shabbat service, one would be hard pressed not to notice the overriding theme of the specific psalms read. The Kabbalat Shabbat service is almost entirely composed of selections from the Book of Psalms. Psalms 95-99 are often called “the coronation psalms” because they picture God as sovereign of the universe.<sup>22</sup> Although we may question why this the theme of kingship was used, these psalms seem to reflect a ritual, perhaps even an annual event, from Temple times through which God was re-enthroned, and his kingship celebrated.

The proclamation of God’s kingship, referred to in the Kabbalistic realm as “malchut”, may aid us in understanding who God is and our relationship with the concept of malchut. By declaring God as our King, we recognize God as the all-powerful Creator and Ruler of the universe. Yet, although God is seen in this understanding as perfect and requiring nothing, there is one thing God does not have without us: kingship. A king requires subjects, and as the Kabbalists express it, it is known to all that the purpose of the creation of the world is the revelation of [G-d’s] sovereignty, for there is no king without a nation.<sup>23</sup> Expounding on this Kaballistic concept, malchut is the tenth and final sefirah that make up the sefirot. These ten sefirot are the ten attributes and emanations through which God is revealed in both the physical realm and the chain of higher metaphysical realms. The ten *sefirot* are:

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<sup>22</sup> Hoffman, Lawrence. *My People’s Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries, Vol. 8 - Kabbalat Shabbat*. (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005), 53.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.aish.com/atr/Rosh-Hashanah-God-Kingship-Malchut.html>

1) *Keter* – Crown 2) *Chachma* – Wisdom 3) *Binah/Daat* – Understanding/Knowledge  
4) *Chesed* – Lovingkindness 5) *Gevurah* – Strength 6) *Tiferet* – Beauty 7) *Netzach* –  
Victory 8) *Hod* – Splendor 9) *Yesod* – Foundation 10) *Malchut* – Kingship of malchut.

If one envisions the world as ringed by the *sefirot*, then the *sefirah* of *malchut* is the one closest to the earth, because it is the one that channels and connects all the other *sefirot* between the human and the Divine. Kabbalists refer to this picture when claiming (adapting a well-known philosophic adage) that the final *sefirah*, *shekhinah*, (representing the feminine, harmonious Shabbat) was directly joined to the highest *sefirah*, “last in deed but first in thought.”<sup>24</sup>

In a sense, we might see ourselves as the ruler of our own world. And as ruler, we must continually strive for balance. In so doing, we must treat our neighbors with compassion while at the same time maintain justice and our own dignity. It is a good ruler who is neither too strict nor too gentle. A ruler who works to create a sustainable world for future generations and thus, the ruler’s very relationship to the earth itself is tied to *malchut*.

As the theme of kingship is so prevalent throughout the psalms, it should be noted that the enthronement could have been celebrated as part of the festivals beginning with Rosh Hashanah and moving through Sukkot. Perhaps a remnant of this ancient ritual is

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<sup>24</sup> Green, Arthur. *Radical Judaism; Rethinking God & Tradition*. (London: Yale University Press, 2010), 65.

the kingship theme, so prevalent in the Rosh Hashanah service.<sup>25</sup> The following six psalms represent the six work days of creation and thus the whole is a kind of enactment of the creation story in the first chapter of Genesis, culminating in the arrival of Shabbat.

An important note to keep in mind is that the facilitator of the Kabbalat Shabbat experience actually takes on the role of ba'al tefilah, master of prayer. In order for there to be a sense of order and harmony, this person should lead the prayers and readings in such a way as to create a pleasing prayer experience for all participants. One of the main jobs of a Ba'al tefilah is to set up an atmosphere in the room that helps others to pray. Attention should be given to pacing (fast or slow), dynamics (loud or quiet), intensity (emotional energy), and complexity (artistically difficult or simple).<sup>26</sup>

**PSALM 95...**In this Psalm there are two appeals made, two exhortations to join in worship. In the very first line we read, *O come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.* The other exhortation is found in Verse 6, *O come, let us bow down and bend the knee; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.* These are two invitations with two seemingly separate expressions of worship. One can be seen as an invitation to sing and the other as an invitation to prayer. Thus, in the very beginning of this psalm, we are immediately made aware that the physical gathering together of community in a congregational worship largely consists of singing and prayer.

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<sup>25</sup> Hoffman, Lawrence. *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries, Vol. 8 - Kabbalat Shabbat.* (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005), 53.

<sup>26</sup> Weisenberg, Joey. *Building Singing Communities.* (New Jersey: Mechaon Hadar, 2011), 53.

**PSALM 96...**This psalm is filled with imperatives that call for active praise: “*sing unto the Lord;*” “*proclaim His salvation;*” “*declare His glory;*” “*ascribe unto the Lord.*” Close attention should be given to the fact that the opening call to sing a “new song” does not actually elicit a song with fresh lyrics or music at all, but rather a song with a universal scope that declares the extent of God’s sovereignty. Although God’s people are to sing this song as a form of worship in the Temple, it recognizes God’s rule and reign over all creatures. It can be deduced that one reason for the praise this psalm evokes is the acknowledgment of God as the one true creator of heaven and earth, the maker of all things (verses 4-6). The concept of the Creator’s oneness should not be lost while this psalm is recited as this song originated in a time and place in which many deities were recognized. Every nation had its gods and claimed them to have sovereignty.

**PSALM 97...**In the first five verses of this psalm, the glory of God is revealed even as God is hidden in the mystery of clouds and thick darkness. We read of irresistible fire proceeding him, lightning and thunder manifesting his power; the unqualified sovereignty of God.” That sovereignty, however, is not based on brute force but rather, of righteousness and justice. God’s power is not arbitrary, but expresses God’s character of mercy and truth. Righteousness, justice, mercy and truth; careful attention to the reading of this psalm should be given as these are attributes that will be expounded upon during the various questions and activities within this session.

## **We begin with Psalm 95.**

*1 Come, let us sing joyously to the LORD, raise a shout for our rock and deliverer; 2 let us come into His presence with praise; let us raise a shout for Him in song! 3 For the LORD is a great God, the great king of all divine beings. 4 In His hand are the depths of the earth; the peaks of the mountains are His. 5 His is the sea, He made it; and the land, which His hands fashioned. 6 Come, let us bow down and kneel, bend the knee before the LORD our maker, 7 for He is our God, and we are the people He tends, the flock in His care. O, if you would but heed His charge this day: 8 Do not be stubborn as at Meribah, as on the day of Massah, in the wilderness, 9 when your fathers put Me to the test, tried Me, though they had seen My deeds. 10 Forty years I was provoked by that generation; I thought, "They are a senseless people; they would not know My ways." 11 Concerning them I swore in anger, "They shall never come to My resting-place!"<sup>27</sup>*

### **SESSION III: Tier I; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

#### **PSALM 95; ACTIVITY #1**

**KAVANAH:** - To explore Psalm 95 in depth by eliciting personal reflections from each of the participants.

**ACTIVITY:** Explore the following questions by handing out cards with one question on each card. Questions can be as follows: What does it mean to sing unto, and shout for joy at, God? What precisely is the salvation we are joyful about? How do we understand G-d as a monarch? What is being demonstrated by bowing down and kneeling before G-d? What are we to derive from the shepherd/flock analogy? Why is

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<sup>27</sup> *Tanakh; The Holy Scriptures. The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text.* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985) Ps 95:1-11.

hardening one's heart contrary to the theme of this psalm? What is the connection between joy and Shabbat?

**PREP:** Question cards

### **SESSION III:** Tier I; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers

#### **PSALM 95; ACTIVITY #2**

**KAVANAH:** - To gain a more personal connection to the wording used in this specific psalm by engaging our speaking voice, our singing voice and/or our body.

**ACTIVITY:** With a partner, choose an idea that resonates with you and sing it to your partner. This could be taken from the entire psalm, a few verses, or just a few words. Alternatives to singing could be speaking or acting it out. Example: Demonstrating how can one act out the role of recognizing God as a type of monarchal entity; a song or debate between God and the generation that "wearied" God.

**PREP:** Psalm 95

### **SESSION III:** Tier I; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers

#### **PSALM 95; ACTIVITY #3**

**KAVANAH:** - As Shabbat is a time to stop and be content with who, what and where we are, so too this activity offers us the opportunity to gain a more personal connection to the theme of gratefulness.

**ACTIVITY:** Brainstorm the theme of thanksgiving; of gratitude. Working individually, or in pairs, create an artistic representation of that theme, incorporating one, or as many, occurrences for gratitude.

**PREP:** Art supplies

### **SESSION III: Tier I; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

#### **PSALM 95; RITUAL**

**KAVANAH:** To develop a deep sense of gratitude for life. As this ritual proceeds, the desired result is that the participants will hear the many different reasons for gratitude and thus, bring awareness that there is indeed so much to be thankful for in life. It should be noted that some may truly find it difficult to find anything worthy of gratitude. As uncomfortable as this may be, there is the potential for enlightenment as others may rally around and help this person identify areas in life where there may be some cause for gratefulness.

**RITUAL:** Decorate an outdoor area in the theme of a royal procession. Gather all the participants and begin the procession. Create a station along the way where thanksgiving offerings can be made. As each participant places their offering at the designated station, they are to state out loud what they are giving thanks for.

**PREP:** Utilize the art work created in Activity #3.

**We then move on to Psalm 96.**

*1 Sing to the LORD a new song, sing to the LORD, all the earth. 2 Sing to the LORD, bless His name, proclaim His victory day after day. 3 Tell of His glory among the nations, His wondrous deeds, among all peoples. 4 For the LORD is great and much acclaimed, He is held in awe by all divine beings. 5 All the gods of the peoples are mere idols, but the LORD made the heavens. 6 Glory and majesty are before Him; strength and splendor are in His temple. 7 Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name, bring tribute and enter His courts. 9 Bow down to the LORD majestic in holiness; tremble in His presence, all the earth! 10 Declare among the nations, "The LORD is king!" the world stands firm; it cannot be shaken; He judges the peoples with equity. 11 Let the heavens rejoice and the earth exult; let the sea and all within it thunder, 12 the fields and everything in them exult; then shall all the trees of the forest shout for joy 13 at the presence of the LORD, for He is coming, for He is coming to rule the earth; He will rule the world justly, and its peoples in faithfulness.<sup>28</sup>*

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<sup>28</sup> Ps 96:1-13 NJPS Tanakh



### **SESSION III: Tier I; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

#### **PSALM 96; ACTIVITY #1**

**KAVANAH:** To explore Psalm 96 in depth by eliciting personal reflections from each of the participants.

**ACTIVITY:** Explore the following questions by handing out cards with one question on each card. Questions can be as follows: What does a “new song” mean to you? How does one go about blessing G-d’s name? What does it mean to declare his glory among the nations and what is “the nations” referring to? What are the other gods, He is to be feared above? With no Temple in our midst, how can we bring an offering and/or come into His courts? What can “trembling before Him” mean? How can nature sing G-d’s praises?

**PREP:** Question cards

### **SESSION III: Tier I; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

#### **PSALM 96; ACTIVITY #2**

**KAVANAH:** To develop our connection with the natural world and the idea that all of creation sings the Creator’s praise. A song that can be chosen and sung during this activity is “Mizmor Shir” by Shlomo Carlebach. The lyrics speak of the idea that nature itself sings the song of Shabbat. (see the ritual suggested in Session 1)

**ACTIVITY:** Have participants create a song that could have been written from the perspective of the following entities: the heavens, the earth, the sea, the field, and the trees. Then, acting as that entity, sing the song to the other participants.

**PREP:** Paper and writing instrument

## **SESSION III: Tier I; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

### **PSALM 96; RITUAL**

**KAVANAH:** To gain an appreciation for the natural world by inhabiting each entity and exploring how it is connected to us and the theme of Shabbat.

**RITUAL:** Using the same (or similar) outdoor area decorated in the theme of a royal procession, gather all the participants and begin the procession. Create stations dedicated to each of the following: the heavens, the earth, the sea, the field, and the trees. As the group arrives at each of the stations, the participants, in a meditative manner, voice words and/or statements that could reflect each of these entities' thoughts and ideas. As each word or statement is uttered, the next participant may choose to add on to what was uttered previously or they may choose to utter something entirely different.

**PREP:** Outdoor area pre-set with the following stations: the heavens, the earth, the sea, the field, and the trees.

#### **Session III concludes with Psalm 97.**

*1 The LORD is king! Let the earth exult, the many islands rejoice! 2 Dense clouds are around Him, righteousness and justice are the base of His throne. 3 Fire is His vanguard, burning His foes on every side. 4 His lightnings light up the world; the earth is convulsed at the sight; 5 mountains melt like wax at the LORD's presence, at the presence of the Lord of all the earth. 6 The heavens proclaim His righteousness and all peoples see His glory. 7 All who worship images, who vaunt their idols, are dismayed; all divine beings bow down to Him. 8 Zion, hearing it, rejoices, the towns of Judah*

*exult, because of Your judgments, O LORD. 9 For You, LORD, are supreme over all the earth; You are exalted high above all divine beings. 10 O you who love the LORD, hate evil! He guards the lives of His loyal ones, saving them from the hand of the wicked. 11 Light is sown for the righteous, radiance for the upright. 12 O you righteous, rejoice in the LORD and acclaim His holy name!*<sup>29</sup>

### **SESSION III: Tier I; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

#### **PSALM 97; ACTIVITY #1**

**KAVANAH:** To explore Psalm 97 in depth by eliciting personal reflections from each of the participants.

**ACTIVITY:** Explore the following questions by handing out cards with one question on each card. Questions can be as follows: How can the earth rejoice? What is meant by righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne? What might the earth have seen and why might it have trembled when His lightnings lighted up the world? How do the heavens declare His righteousness? How is light sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart?

**PREP:** Question cards

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<sup>29</sup> Ps 97:1-12 NJPS Tanakh

### **SESSION III: Tier I; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

#### **PSALM 97; ACTIVITY #2**

**KAVANAH:** To develop an understanding as to what may constitute a “graven image.”

This activity can be extremely enlightening as it has the potential for the participant to go deep within themselves and examine their actions. Great care should be taken with this activity as it can open up past behaviors and their resulting wounds.

**ACTIVITY:** Have participants share graven images they may have served, and/or currently serve and explain why serving them could cause shame. Explore ways of how we can live in a world with so many graven images and yet strive for a morally upright lifestyle.

**PREP:** None

### **SESSION III: Tier I; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

#### **PSALM 97; RITUAL**

**KAVANAH:** To identify habits, attitudes and/or actions that do not serve us well and with sincere intention, physically remove them from our midst. Once removed, we then look for positive habits, attitudes and/or actions that can fill the void.

**RITUAL:** Participants are first asked to think of habits, attitudes and/or actions that would constitute “serving a graven image”. This ritual requires a fire pit set up as a communal depository along with a pile of stones and a bed of flowers. Decorate the surrounding area in such a way as to delineate it as a sacred space. As each participant makes their way past the marked entrance of this space, they are to take a stone and, sitting quietly away from others, place on that stone any personal actions

that would constitute the concept of serving a graven image. At a specified time, they then move to the fire pit and place the stone inside, effectively burning up that image. They then move to another area preset with flowers and take a flower. Sitting in the same spot as before, they then place on to the flower an action that can replace and correct the action previously placed on the stone.

**PREP:** Outdoor area consisting of a flower bed, stones and some form of a fire pit.

**END OF SESSION III**

## **SESSION IV: TIER II; IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION OF PRAYERS**

- Psalm 98
- Psalm 99
- Psalm 29
- Ana B'Koach

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

As we continue exploring the psalms read during the Kabbalat Shabbat experience, we attempt to draw connections between these specific psalms. We notice that psalm 96 and 98 begin identically, “Sing unto the Lord a new song! Psalm 97 and 99 also begin identically, “The Lord reigns!” Thus Israel and all creation sing out to God acclaiming and acknowledging the sovereignty of the creator of heaven and earth whose work of creation is finished on the seventh day.<sup>30</sup>

**PSALM 98...**This psalm can be seen as building on the preceding three psalms expressing an almost ecstatic fervor of praise.<sup>31</sup> The gathered people of God are invited to sing a new song because the Lord “has done marvelous things.” In a sense, the reader is encouraged to reflect on the nature of those “wonderful things”, compelling one to search out and identify specifics that could be described as such. As one reads this psalm, they may be reminded that God indeed has been acting through major events in the lives of God’s people, like the exodus, the wandering in the wilderness and the conquest of Canaan. This is a psalm filled with joy and acclamation, deriving not just from the people of God with many instruments of praise but also, every part of creation and their own unique manner of worship.

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<sup>30</sup> Sarason, Rabbi Richard. *Divrei Mishkan T’Filah; Delving into the Siddur*. (New York: CCAR Press, 2018), 115.

<sup>31</sup> Hoffman, Lawrence. *My People’s Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries, Vol. 8 - Kabbalat Shabbat*. (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005), 88.

**PSALM 99...**The holiness of the divine government is the subject of this psalm as it declares the holiness of God in the first few verses. It goes on to mention the equity of the king whom God has appointed, providing an illustration of God's love of holiness. It may also be describing God, himself the king, in verses 4-5, and once again reiterating the import of both justice and righteousness. It then sets forth the righteous character of God's dealings with those favored persons who in former times he had selected to approach him on behalf of the people. It makes clear four illustrious leaders of the Jewish people; David the king, Moses the lawgiver, Aaron the priest, and Samuel the seer, all honored to lead the people, and plead for them on their behalf. In this psalm, we see a part of a God who loves justice and takes vengeance against the people for their misdeeds. He is loyal to that and yet we also see that because the people listened to God and executed his judgments, God forgave them.

**PSALM 29...**Psalm 29 has often been categorized as a victory hymn, analogous to the Song of the Sea (Ex. 15:1-18; also called the Song of Moses), the Song of Deborah (Judges 5) and the Song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10). Here we witness a sort of thunderstorm although, not as a phenomenon of impersonal nature, but rather as an act of divine intervention. The psalm opens with a call for praise to the Lord (verse 1-2). We next read of a description of the Lord's power in a storm: first over the sea (verses 3-4), then over Lebanon (verses 5-6), and finally over the wilderness (verses 7-9). God's granting of power to His people (verses 10-11) concludes the psalm. An interesting side note is an explanation given by Rabbi Hillel, the son of Rabbi Shmuel bar



Nehmana. He explains that the 18 benedictions of the daily Amidah correspond to the 18 times God's ineffable name (Y-H-V-H) is mentioned in this psalm.<sup>32</sup>

**ANA BEKOACH...**Although the authorship of this mystical prayer is unknown, it is often attributed to a first and second century rabbi by the name of Rabbi Nehunia ben HaKanah. An important element of this prayer is that of helping people achieve their best version in life and have them imbued with good will and the desire to help others. Additionally, it is a prayer that can provide one with strength and the capacity to fight the bad elements of life without tainting his soul. However, should the fight not have the desired outcome, the same prayer helps one take life in his hands and start all over, which is highly important as well.

The prayer is composed of seven lines, each line having six words. The first letter of every word comprises the 42-letter name of God.<sup>33</sup> Each line of this prayer can be seen as transmitting a different type of energy which can be utilized in solving a different kind of problem. The first line is considered to be the most energetic one, providing comfort in times of need and energy to counter stress and/or danger. The second line entrusts upon the user the power to control negative events and even move them forward in the future. And so goes the rest of this prayer, each line attributed with great significance.

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<sup>32</sup> Talmud Berachot 28b, as cited in <https://judaism.stackexchange.com/questions/105284/why-are-the-number-of-blessings-in-the-amidah-linked-to-psalm-29>

<sup>33</sup> <https://kabbalah.com/en/articles/the-prayer-of-the-kabbalist/>

From a Kabbalistic perspective, the "Ana BeKoach" prayer moves the reader towards a higher realm of spiritual guidance, where infinite possibilities await them. The combination of letters, colors and attributes all attribute to the strength of this prayer. Although this prayer has traditionally been used mostly by Kabbalists, to the extent that it was omitted from every single prayer book of the past two centuries, it is finding an audience among lay people seeking its incredible sense of solace.

Apart from being an indicator of the presence of God, this prayer also acts as a metaphor for the Jewish people's journey from slavery to freedom. As did the Israelites, we, as humans, also experience slavery. Many of us are enslaved in our everyday lives with situations and/or conditions that keep us in *Mitzrayim*, the Hebrew word for Egypt. It is interesting to note that this name is derived from *m'tzarim*, meaning "narrow straits". (מצר - *mi*, "from," *tzar*, "narrow" or "tight"). When God took us out of *Mitzrayim*, we were, in a sense, extricated from the place of constriction, tight control, and narrow-mindedness, where our very movement was severely limited; a place where enslavement to behaviors and attitudes often seem out of our control. The focus here is not just the slavery to the actual Egyptian people but also to the deeper concept of our inner selves being enslaved as well. Although the external layer of slavery was left behind, the inner layer remained. This result was that the Israelites had to undergo a different kind of journey, one which would help them lose the inner slavery stage as well. There is no better time than Shabbat to experience that freedom we all long for and deserve.

**We begin with Psalm 98:**

*1 A psalm. Sing to the LORD a new song, for He has worked wonders; His right hand, His holy arm, has won Him victory. 2 The LORD has manifested His victory, has displayed His triumph in the sight of the nations. 3 He was mindful of His steadfast love and faithfulness toward the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth beheld the victory of our God. 4 Raise a shout to the LORD, all the earth, break into joyous songs of praise! 5 Sing praise to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and melodious song. 6 With trumpets and the blast of the horn raise a shout before the LORD, the king. 7 Let the sea and all within it thunder, the world and its inhabitants; 8 let the rivers clap their hands, the mountains sing joyously together 9 at the presence of the LORD, for He is coming to rule the earth; He will rule the world justly, and its peoples with equity.<sup>34</sup>*

**SESSION IV: Tier II; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

**PSALM 98; ACTIVITY #1**

**KAVANAH:** To explore Psalm 98 in depth by eliciting personal reflections from each of the participants.

**ACTIVITY:** Explore the following questions by handing out cards with one question on each card. Questions can be as follows: Why the instruction to “sing a new song” and for what marvelous things might this new song be referring? Does anthropomorphizing G-d benefit or detract from your concept of the Divine? What images and ideas come

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<sup>34</sup> Ps 98:1-9 NJPS Tanakh

to mind relating to the use of musical instruments. How does involving nature add or detract from this psalm?

**PREP:** Question cards

#### **SESSION IV:** Tier II; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers

##### **PSALM 98; ACTIVITY #2:**

**KAVANAH:** As Shabbat can be seen as a sacred time of deep reflection, this activity encourages us to focus on the newness of life; new relationships, new opportunities, new outlook, etc. As the old week is gone and the new week approaching, reflecting on these areas can have an impact on how the upcoming week evolves.

**ACTIVITY:** Ask participants to write a new song to G-d incorporating the characters listed in this psalm; earth, sea, floods, mountains. Songs can be shared orally by singing and/or speaking the verses. As this psalm speaks of the worshiper offering praise with a variety of musical instruments, this would be an opportune time to have any participants play their musical instruments as well, if at all possible.

**PREP:** Paper and writing instrument.

## SESSION IV: Tier II; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers

### PSALM 98; RITUAL

**KAVANAH:** To train our eyes to actively seek out newness in life, whether it be physical, emotional or spiritual.

**RITUAL:** Moving to an outdoor area, conduct a meditation walk, silently moving through the space while seeking out newness in creation. Examples could be budding flowers, new grasses, saplings, etc.

**PREP:** Outdoor area with the previously mentioned items.

**We move on to Psalm 99:**

*1 The LORD, enthroned on cherubim, is king, peoples tremble, the earth quakes. 2 The LORD is great in Zion, and exalted above all peoples. 3 They praise Your name as great and awesome; He is holy! 4 Mighty king who loves justice, it was You who established equity, You who worked righteous judgment in Jacob. 5 Exalt the LORD our God and bow down to His footstool; He is holy! 6 Moses and Aaron among His priests, Samuel, among those who call on His name— when they called to the LORD, He answered them. 7 He spoke to them in a pillar of cloud; they obeyed His decrees, the law He gave them. 8 O LORD our God, You answered them; You were a forgiving God for them, but You exacted retribution for their misdeeds. 9 Exalt the LORD our God, and bow toward His holy hill, for the LORD our God is holy.<sup>35</sup>*

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<sup>35</sup> Ps 99:1-9 NJPS Tanakh

## **SESSION IV: Tier II; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

### **PSALM 99; ACTIVITY #1**

**KAVANAH:** To explore Psalm 99 in depth by eliciting personal reflections from each of the participants.

**ACTIVITY:** Explore the following questions by handing out cards with one question on each card. Questions can be as follows: What feelings and thoughts do you get when you picture God on His throne? In what sense might the Psalmist refer to God's name as "great and awful"? How does God execute judgment and righteousness among His own people? How has God executed justice and righteousness in Jacob? What can be deduced from the idea that God is described as a lover of justice as well as forgiving? Can you think of scenarios in our Bible in which God displays justice? Forgiveness? How do we execute judgment? What might be the significance of the mentioning of biblical characters such as Moses, Aaron and Samuel?

**PREP:** Question cards

## **SESSION IV: Tier II; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

### **PSALM 99; RITUAL**

**KAVANAH:** To explore the concept of a God who loves justice and yet, is forgiving.

**RITUAL:** Focusing on the concept of forgiveness specifically spoken of in this psalm, have participants write on a slip of paper any areas in their lives where they feel justice may not have been afforded and thus, forgiveness is merited. For some participants, this may take the form of granting forgiveness to past offenders; for others it may be seeking forgiveness for past offenses. One by one, each participant places the slip of

wax paper in a water-filled bowl and watches as the written words dissolve. This activity can be extremely powerful for participants who cannot offer and/or seek forgiveness due to circumstances such as death, in which the involved party is physically unreachable. The very real connection this ritual has to Shabbat should be emphasized as it deals with emotional cleansing. So too, Shabbat is a time for cleansing as many will go to a mikvah (ritual bath) just prior to Shabbat for a similar cleansing, both physical and spiritual.

**PREP:** Slips of wax paper, marker, bowl filled with water.

**We move on to Psalm 29:**

*29:1 A psalm of David. Ascribe to the LORD, O divine beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name; bow down to the LORD, majestic in holiness. 3 The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over the mighty waters. 4 The voice of the LORD is power; the voice of the LORD is majesty; 5 the voice of the LORD breaks cedars; the LORD shatters the cedars of Lebanon. 6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion, like a young wild ox. 7 The voice of the LORD kindles flames of fire; 8 the voice of the LORD convulses the wilderness; the LORD convulses the wilderness of Kadesh; 9 the voice of the LORD causes hinds to calve, and strips forests bare; while in His temple all say "Glory!" 10 The LORD sat enthroned at the Flood; the LORD sits enthroned, king forever. 11 May the LORD grant strength to His people; may the LORD bestow on His people wellbeing.<sup>36</sup>*

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<sup>36</sup> Ps 29:1-11 NJPS Tanakh

**SESSION IV: Tier II; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

**PSALM 29; ACTIVITY #1**

**KAVANAH:** To explore Psalm 29 in depth by eliciting personal reflections from each of the participants.

**ACTIVITY:** Explore the following questions by handing out cards with one question on each card. Questions can be as follows: What does it mean to ascribe unto the Lord? How might one worship the Lord in beauty and holiness? What is the significance of “voice” so often used in this psalm?

**PREP:** Question cards

**SESSION IV: Tier II; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

**PSALM 29; ACTIVITY #2**

**KAVANAH:** To relate the theme of Psalm 29 to our world today and discover the true power of voice, both individually and collectively.

**ACTIVITY:** Hold a group discussion centered on the many voices in our society today, both beneficial as well as destructive.

**PREP:** None



## **SESSION IV: Tier II; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

### **PSALM 29; RITUAL**

**KAVANAH:** In the creation story, God “speaks” the world into existence (vayomer Hashem - and God said). The intention of this activity is to actually experience, through the sense of feeling, the healing power of voice and inhabit the truth that words and tonality do indeed matter in all our actions.

**RITUAL:** To focus on the overriding theme of God’s voice, have participants choose a partner and conduct the following ritual: Participant #1 sits comfortable in a chair with eyes closed while participant #2 softly whispers words of comfort, beauty, encouragement and peace.

**PREP:** Each group should be afforded approximately 5-10 minutes per partner to share each participant’s brief history along with personal likes and dislikes. This will enable each partner to personalize the words whispered.

#### **We conclude Session IV with Ana BeKoach:**

*We beg thee with the strength and greatness of thy right arm. Untangle our knotted fate. Accept your people's song, elevate and purify us. Please, heroic one, those who pursue your uniqueness - guard them as the pupil of an eye. Bless them, purify them, pity them, may your righteousness always reward them. Powerful and Holy One, in goodness lead your flock. Unique and proud one, to your people turn, who remember your holiness. Accept our cries, and hear our screams, O knower of mysteries.*

## **SESSION IV: Tier II; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

### **ANA BEKOACH: ACTIVITY #1**

**KAVANAH:** To explore the Ana BeKoach prayer in depth by eliciting personal reflections from each of the participants.

**ACTIVITY:** Explore the following questions by handing out cards with one question on each card. Questions can be as follows: What can the term, “knotted fate” mean? How can we related the term “knots” to our everyday lives? What may be some examples of the people’s song? How can we be divinely elevated and purified? How might a person pursue G-d’s uniqueness? What is the holiness we are to remember?

**PREP:** Question cards

## **SESSION IV: Tier II; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

### **ANA BEKOACH: ACTIVITY #2**

**KAVANAH:** The term knotted fate can be somewhat vague. This tactile activity encourages each participant to physically explore this concept. Just as Shabbat can act as a healing experience from a difficult week filled with many “knots”, so too the following activities and ritual can have a similar effect of healing.

**ACTIVITY:** Using a piece of rope, have each participant tie a knot, explain what that knot might represent, and then pass it on to the next participant.

**PREP:** A long piece of rope.

## **SESSION IV: Tier II; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

### **ANA BEKOACH: ACTIVITY #3**

**KAVANAH:** Much like in Activity #2 and once again as the term knotted fate can be somewhat vague, this tactile activity will encourage each participant to physically explore this concept, but with a slight twist in the approach.

**ACTIVITY:** Give each participant a long piece of rope that is tangled and filled with many knots. Instruct participants to untie and/or untangle sections of the rope while sharing how it may be a representation of untangling in an area of their life or in society as a whole.

**PREP:** A long piece of rope, previously knotted and tangled.

## **SESSION IV: Tier II; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

### **ANA BECHOACH: RITUAL**

**KAVANAH:** This is a full body exercise in which the participant actually feels the “knotted fate” described in this prayer by physically walking the labyrinth. Please note that the participant reflection time following this ritual can be extended as this is likely to elicit much emotion and thought.

**RITUAL:** If at all possible, gain access to a labyrinth. Have participants, walk this labyrinth while meditating and/or actually reading the words of this prayer. Encourage the participant to focus on areas in their life where they feel entangled and knotted.

**PREP:** A labyrinth and time (15-20 minutes) prior to entering the labyrinth for introspection in order to have the focus necessary for this ritual.

### **END OF SESSION IV**

**SESSION V:** Tier III; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers

- Lecha Dodi
- Psalm 92
- Psalm 93

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

We now come to the third and final tier of the actual prayers traditionally recited during the Kabbalat Shabbat observance.

**LECHA DODI...**Lecha Dodi is one of the most widely known parts of the Kabbalat Shabbat experience. It is a mystical hymn composed by the kabbalist Rabbi Shlomo HaLevi Alkabetz in the 16th century. Rabbi Alkabetz was a teacher and brother-in-law of the famed kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Cordovero and was one of the esteemed members of the Safed circle of scholars and mystics, of which included such learned men as Rabbi Yosef Caro, Rabbi Moshe Cordovero and Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, the holy Ari. What is especially interesting to note is that in this particular hymn, Rabbi Alkabetz signed his name - Shlomo HaLevi - in the acrostic formed by the first letter of the first eight stanzas of the hymn.

This is a somewhat mysterious hymn as there is speculation surrounding who exactly is being spoken of in these verses. The phrase *Lekhah Dodi* means "come my beloved," and is a request of a mysterious "beloved". Is this beloved speaking of God, a select group of people, or could it be referring to the singer's friends? Either way, the bride being spoken of refers to greeting the Shabbat as in "likrat kallah." As previously discussed in Session III, the Shabbat, the seventh day of the week, is the manifestation of the tenth *sefira* - *malchut*. Since *malchut* also corresponds to the Jewish people and to the *Shechina*, the hymn may be interpreted as not only referring to the Shabbat, but also alluding to the Jewish people, to the *sefira* of *malchut* and to the *Shechina*.

According to a sweet midrashic teaching, when God created the world, Shabbat pleaded with God, saying: “Everyone else has a mate (i.e. Sunday has Monday as a partner, Tuesday has Wednesday, etc.), but I have no one!” God answered: “The community of Israel will be your mate.”<sup>37</sup> To further elaborate on this very theme, the Maharal of Prague, Rabbi Yehuda Loewe, explains that the three terms “Shabbat,” “bride” and “queen” represent the three different ways we honor the Shabbat. We rest from work, we wear special clothing as if getting dressed up for a ceremony, and we indulge in special treats, and pleasurable activities.<sup>38</sup> It is from this view that on Shabbat, we indeed become the bride.

The first two stanzas describing the Sabbath draw upon a beautiful Talmudic tradition. Rabbi Chanina would wrap himself in his special garments on Shabbat eve and say, “Come, and we will go out to greet Shabbat the queen.” Another sage, Rabbi Yannai, would don his garment on Shabbat eve and say, “Enter, O bride. Enter, O bride.”<sup>39</sup> The next six stanzas address Jerusalem, a ruined and abandoned city, and urges her in the words of the prophet Isaiah to, “Arise and shine, for the light of her redemption has come and the glory of God is revealed over her.”<sup>40</sup> It is in the very last stanza that we see the Sabbath bride being directly addressed, bidding her to enter among the faithful

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<sup>37</sup> Bereishit Rabbah 11:8, as cited in [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/3753326/jewish/Four-Reasons-Shabbat-Is-Compared-to-Bride-and-a-Queen.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3753326/jewish/Four-Reasons-Shabbat-Is-Compared-to-Bride-and-a-Queen.htm)

<sup>38</sup> Maharal, Chiddushei Aggadot on Talmud Bava Kamma, as cited in [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/3753326/jewish/Four-Reasons-Shabbat-Is-Compared-to-Bride-and-a-Queen.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3753326/jewish/Four-Reasons-Shabbat-Is-Compared-to-Bride-and-a-Queen.htm)

<sup>39</sup> Shabbat 119a, as cited in [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/3753326/jewish/Four-Reasons-Shabbat-Is-Compared-to-Bride-and-a-Queen.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3753326/jewish/Four-Reasons-Shabbat-Is-Compared-to-Bride-and-a-Queen.htm)

<sup>40</sup> Isaiah 60:1

of God's treasured people with great exuberance by joyfully exclaiming, Bo'i kallah! Bo'i kallah! (Enter, O Bride! Enter, O bride!). So symbolic is this climax that in congregational settings, the congregation physically rises for this stanza and faces the entrance where the sun is setting and Shabbat is entering.

About this particular hymn, Lawrence Hoffman states, "Lecha Dodi is the most perfect poem in Jewish liturgy. The structure of the poem is flawless, adhering to strict rhyme and meter. The words themselves are composed almost entirely of biblical passages, sometimes rearranged for variety, yet they convey outstanding novel imagery and kabbalistic nuances beyond compare."<sup>41</sup>

The intention for this Kabbalat Shabbat gathering can be found in this hymn which looks forward to the time when even during the working week we will experience the same holiness as we experienced on the Shabbat. This is a most important point as part of the goal of transformation is to experience this gathering in a manner that will be drawn upon beyond the actual event and well into the week ahead.

**PSALM 92...**After Lecha Dodi, the liturgical section of the Kabbalat Shabbat observance concludes with the recitation or singing of Psalms 92 and 93. These are most appropriate psalms to be recited at this time as they speak of the wonders of creation which were manifest fully on the eve of Shabbat. The psalm is one of praise

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<sup>41</sup> Hoffman, Lawrence. *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries, Vol. 8 - Kabbalat Shabbat*. (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005), 119.

and of thanksgiving. It is optimistic, looking forward to the complete destruction of all God's enemies and the complete triumph and happiness of his righteous ones.

**PSALM 93...**As in the previous psalm, God is once again set forth as manifesting himself in the character of King. He robes himself in majesty and reigns openly. Although some of the imagery makes for an unstable environment, the world is unmistakably fixed under God's control. The waters toss themselves; *i.e.* the powers of the world array themselves in opposition to God. Vainly, however, God in heaven is mightier than they. Holiness is especially shown in God's "house" and will abide until the end of days. God's kingship and a connection with Friday, the sixth day of the week are the two main themes of Psalm 93. The theme of kingship is obvious but the relation to Friday is a bit more obscure. To bring some clarity to this idea, we look to the study of gematria, the traditional method of interpretation based on computing the numerical value of letters and words. This psalm contains 45 Hebrew words which happens to be the gematria of the word *adam* (Hebrew: אדם, "man"). Since Adam was created on the sixth day of Creation we have a connection to Friday and see how this psalm was designated as the Song of the Day for Friday, to be sung by the Levites in the Temple in Jerusalem. This tradition continues today in the psalm's inclusion in the regular Friday morning prayer service.

We begin with Lecha Dodi:

*Lecha dodi likrat kalla, p'nei Shabbat n'kabelah.*

*Shamor v'zachor b'dibur echad, Hishmi'anu el ha'meyuchad. Adonai echad u'shmoechad; L'shem ul'tiferet v'l'tehila.*



*Likrat Shabbat l'chu v'nelcha, Ki hi m'kor ha'bracha. Me'rosh mi'kedem n'sucha; Sof ma'aseh b'mach'shava t'chila.*

*Mikdash melech, ir m'lucha, Kumi, tze'i mi'toch ha'hafecha. Rav lach shevet b'emek ha'bacha; V'hu yachmol alai'yich chemla.*

*Hitna'ari me'afar kumi, Livshi bigdei tifartech ami. Al yad ben Yishai beit haLachmi; Karva el nafshi g'ala.*

*Hit'oreri, hit'oreri, Ki va orech, kumi uri. Uri, uri, shir daberi; K'vod Adonai alai'yich nigla. Lo tevoshi ve'lo tikal'mi mah tishtochachi umah tehemi, bach yechesu ani'ei ami, venivnetah ir al tilah.*

*Vehayu lim'shisah shosaich, verachaku kol miv'laich, yasis alaich Elohaich, kimesos chatan al kalah.*

*Yamin usmol tif'rotzi, ve'et hashem ta'aritz, al yad ish bein partzi, venis'mechah venagilah. Bo'i v'shalom, ateret ba'ala, Gam b'rina uv' tzhala. Toch emunei am segula; Bo'i kallah, bo'i kallah.*

*Lecha dodi likrat kalla, p'nei Shabbat n'kabelah!*

English Translation of Lecha Dodi:

*Beloved, come to meet the bride; beloved come to greet Shabbat.*

*“Keep” and “remember”: a single command the Only God caused us to hear; the Eternal is One, God's Name is One; glory and praise are God's.*

*Come with me to meet Shabbat, forever a fountain of blessing. Still it flows, as from the start: the last of days, for which the first was made.*

*Royal shrine, city of kings, rise up and leave your ravaged state. You have dwelt long enough in the valley of tears; now God will shower mercy on you.*

*Lift yourself up! Shake off the dust! Array yourself in beauty, O my people! At hand is Bethlehem's David, Jesse's son, bringing deliverance into my life.*

*Awake, awake, your light has come! Arise, shine, awake and sing: the Eternal's glory dawns upon you.*

*An end to shame and degradation; forget your sorrow; quiet your groans. The afflicted of my people find respite in you, the city renewed upon its ancient ruins.*

*The scavengers are scattered, your devourers have fled; as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, your God takes joy in you.*

*Your space will be broad, your worship free: await the promised one; we will exult, we will sing for joy!*

*Enter in peace, O crown of your husband; enter in gladness, enter in joy. Come to the people that keeps its faith. Enter, O bride! Enter, O bride!<sup>42</sup>*

## **SESSION V:** Tier III; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers

### **LECHA DODI; ACTIVITY #1**

**KAVANAH:** To explore Lecha Dodi in depth by eliciting personal reflections from each of the participants.

**ACTIVITY:** Explore the following questions by handing out cards with one question on each card. Questions can be as follows: What are the similarities and differences in the terms, “observe” and “remember”? What does it mean to relate to Shabbat as “the bride”? What may be the purpose of creating such romantic imagery? The mystics would go out into the field as they sang this hymn. How does the physical act of “going out” to the field effect the notion of receiving the Shabbat? The custom is to rise at the last set of verses and face the open door. What might this suggest?

**PREP:** Question cards

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<sup>42</sup> *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur: Complete: Shabbat, Weekdays, and Festivals.* (New York: CCAR Press, 2007), 138-139

**SESSION V: Tier III; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

**LECHA DODI; ACTIVITY #2**

**KAVANAH:** As Shabbat is likened to a bride, the intention for the following activities and ritual is to explore the concept of romanticism.

**ACTIVITY:** In whole group discussion, share events that constitute a “love affair”. This does not necessarily need to be with another person (although it certainly can) but rather, any type of intense relationship. Examples can be family members, friends, pets, keepsake items, etc. The idea here is to elicit the sense of love and desire that mirror what the mystics may have felt as they would greet their beloved.

**PREP:** None

**SESSION V: Tier III; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers**

**LECHA DODI; ACTIVITY #3**

**KAVANAH:** To further explore the concept of romanticism, in relation to Shabbat.

**ACTIVITY:** Have participants write a love letter to the Shabbat. This letter can contain the participant’s hopes, desires, joys, fears, expectations, etc. Remind participants that it should be written from the perspective of a love letter.

**PREP:** Writing materials.

**SESSION V:** Tier III; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers

**LECHA DODI; RITUAL**

**KAVANAH:** To engage our bodies physically in order to experience the sense of “meeting and greeting”.

**RITUAL:** In an outside area (ideally an open field) and utilizing the letters created in Activity #3, participants will walk from one end of the field to the other end, in which there is a finely-decorated final point of reception. As they make their way toward the reception area, they should have in mind the concept of getting closer and closer to the Shabbat Bride at the opposite end of the field. Their steps can be slow or quick, conventional or skipping, methodical or dancing. Each participant is encouraged to play out their greeting approach in their own personal manner. Additionally, they may choose to have in mind the scenario discussed in Activity #2.

**PREP:** Outside field, decorated reception area, participant letters.

**We move on to Psalm 92.**

*1 A psalm. A song; for the sabbath day. 2 It is good to praise the LORD, to sing hymns to Your name, O Most High, 3 To proclaim Your steadfast love at daybreak, Your faithfulness each night 4 With a ten-stringed harp, with voice and lyre together. 5 You have gladdened me by Your deeds, O LORD; I shout for joy at Your handiwork. 6 How great are Your works, O LORD, how very subtle Your designs! 7 A brutish man cannot know, a fool cannot understand this: 8 though the wicked sprout like grass, though all evildoers blossom, it is only that they may be destroyed forever. 9 But You are exalted, O LORD, for all time. 10 Surely, Your enemies, O LORD, surely, Your enemies perish; all*

*evildoers are scattered. 11 You raise my horn high like that of a wild ox; I am soaked in freshening oil. 12 I shall see the defeat of my watchful foes, hear of the downfall of the wicked who beset me. 13 The righteous bloom like a date-palm; they thrive like a cedar in Lebanon; 14 planted in the house of the LORD, they flourish in the courts of our God. 15 In old age they still produce fruit; they are full of sap and freshness, 16 attesting that the LORD is upright, my rock, in whom there is no wrong.*<sup>43</sup>

**SESSION V:** Tier III; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers

**PSALM 92; ACTIVITY #1**

**KAVANAH:** To explore Psalm 92 in depth by eliciting personal reflections from each of the participants.

**ACTIVITY:** Explore the following questions by handing out cards with one question on each card. Questions can be as follows: How can one go about “singing praises” unto God’s name? What might “lovingkindness in the morning” and “faithfulness in the night seasons” represent on a deeper level? Why might a “brutish man” knoweth not? What can “anointed with rich oil” mean? The last few verses of this psalm utilize trees as a metaphor for the righteous. How does this tie in to the Jewish experience?

**PREP:** Question cards

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<sup>43</sup> Ps 92:1-16 NJPS Tanakh

**SESSION V:** Tier III; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers

**PSALM 92; ACTIVITY #2**

**KAVANAH:** To feel the psalm's essence through music.

**ACTIVITY:** Focusing on the verses, "With an instrument of ten strings, and with the psaltery; With a solemn sound upon the harp." play pre-recorded soft, instrumental music or, ideally, have someone play an instrument live. While the music is being played, invite participants to meditate on the words of the psalm as it is read aloud. Of course, and if at all possible, the ideal setting for the participants to gather around for this mediation would be under a large tree.

**PREP:** Pre-recorded or live music, printout of Psalm 92, a large tree setting.

We conclude Session V with Psalm 93:

*1 The LORD is king, He is robed in grandeur; the LORD is robed, He is girded with strength. The world stands firm; it cannot be shaken. 2 Your throne stands firm from of old; from eternity You have existed. 3 The ocean sounds, O LORD, the ocean sounds its thunder, the ocean sounds its pounding. 4 Above the thunder of the mighty waters, more majestic than the breakers of the sea is the LORD, majestic on high. 5 Your decrees are indeed enduring; holiness befits Your house, O LORD, for all times.<sup>44</sup>*

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<sup>44</sup> Ps 93:1-5 NJPS Tanakh

**SESSION V:** Tier III; In-Depth Exploration of Prayers

**PSALM 93; ACTIVITY #1**

**KAVANAH:** To explore Psalm 93 in depth by eliciting personal reflections from each of the participants.

**ACTIVITY:** Explore the following questions by handing out cards with one question on each card. Questions can be as follows: Though only five verses, this psalm is filled with imagery of a monarch. What effect might this have on the reader? In reading about floods and waters, what comes to mind, either biblically or on a more personally relevant note? The psalm states, “The world is established, it cannot be moved.” What can this mean?

**PREP:** Question cards.

**END OF SESSION V**

**SESSION VI:** Moving to the Altar; The Shabbat Dinner Table

- Candle Lighting
- Kiddush and Hamotzi
- Blessing the Children
- Songs Around the Table
- The Meal
- Birkat HaMazon



## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Just as the Jerusalem Temple had an altar in which holy, sacred work was to be conducted, so too the home of every Jew has within it a sacred space. The altar became the table at which the family gathered to eat its common meals. It is the consumption of food which connects the two institutions. Thus Rabbis Yohanan and Resh Lakish in third century Palestine conceived it to be a place for reconciliation. “In the days of the Temple, the altar served to atone for us; now it is our table that atones for us.”<sup>45</sup> Rashi, in his comment on their assertion, states that the atonement is effected by inviting guests to our table, that is, in repairing our relations with people outside the family.<sup>46</sup> On Friday night, especially, the table is wholly transformed into an altar in which holy work is done. There is a great deal of symbolism with each and every element on the table. As Esther Jungreis writes, the Shabbat table connected us with our past. It was set with a snowy white cloth to remind us of the dew that fell for our forefathers during their 40 year sojourn in the desert. The two challah loaves were in memory of the double portion manna that was given on Friday and the white cloth that covered them was a reminder of the second layer of dew that was there to protect the manna. This sparkling red wine was there for kiddush, to sanctify and to toast the holy day by recalling passages from the Torah, “Then God bless the seventh day and hallowed it.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Tractate Hagiga 27a, as cited in <http://www.jtsa.edu/the-altar-at-home>

<sup>46</sup> Rashi, Tractate Hagiga 27a

<sup>47</sup> Jungreis, Esther. *The Committed Life: Principles for Good Living from Our Timeless Past*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 276.

**CANDLE LIGHTING...**The symbolism of lighting Shabbat candles cannot be overstated. King Solomon taught that “a mitzvah is a candle and Torah is light.”<sup>48</sup> Close attention should be given to the candle lighting ceremony as the primary utterance of the creation story in the Book of Genesis is, “Let there be light.” This is the first act of creation; light and its separation from darkness. The Midrash asks: Where was light created from? And the answer is whispered: “G-d cloaked Himself in a white shawl, and the light of its splendor shone from one end of the world to the other.”<sup>49</sup> The Shabbat Candles are lit on Friday evening before sunset to usher in Shabbat. It is interesting to note that the command to light candles at the onset of Shabbat is not found in the Torah. Rather, lighting *Shabbat* candles is a rabbinically mandated law. It is traditionally done by the woman of the household, but in the absence of a woman, it is done by a man. After lighting the candles, many will move their hands over the candles and towards them (as if bringing in or guiding in the Sabbath); then, covering the eyes, the following blessing is recited:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת.

**TRANSLITERATION:**

*Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat.*

**TRANSLATION:**

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to kindle the light of Shabbat.

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<sup>48</sup> Proverbs 6:23

<sup>49</sup> Bereishit Rabbah 3:4, as cited in <https://steinsaltz.org/essay/hanukkah16/>

**KIDDUSH...**The Kiddush cup; a symbol of the vessel through which, and into which, blessing comes. Exploring gematria once again, we see the numerical value of the letters in the word for drinking cup [in Hebrew, "kos", spelled *kaf, vav, samech* = 86 ] is the same as that of the letters in that name of G-d which expresses divine revelation in the world, in nature, in law - the name *Elohim*.<sup>50</sup>

The kiddush is recited over a cup of wine, filled to the top. The wine is a symbol of joy and the full cup is a symbol of overflowing joy and bounty. There are a number of variations for holding the cup. Of particular note, and one that should be drawn attention to, is the manner in which the cup is held in one's hand. Traditionally, the cup is placed in the palm of the right hand with the five fingers curled upward holding it. This symbolizes the five-petaled rose, the symbol of perfection, of longing for God (the petals reach upward), of the people of Israel. In addition, one of the symbols of *malchut* is the rose. Much attention and discussion can be afforded to the symbolism of the kiddush ritual. It is important that everyone at the table participate in this ritual and has their very own cup of wine or grape juice. The following is the Kiddush blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְרָצָה בָּנוּ. וְשִׁבֵּת קִדְּשׁוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה

וּבְרָצוֹן הַנְּחִילָנוּ זְכוּרוֹן לְמַעֲשֵׂה בְּרָאשִׁית. כִּי הוּא יוֹם תְּחִלָּה לְמִקְרָאֵי קִדְּשׁ זְכוּר לִיציאת מצרים

כִּי בָנוּ בְּחֵרֶת וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדְּשָׁתָּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים וְשִׁבֵּת קִדְּשָׁךְ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הַנְּחִילָנוּ

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' מִקְדֵּשׁ הַשִּׁבֵּת

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<sup>50</sup> Steinsaltz, Adin. *The Thirteen Petalled Rose: A Discourse on the Essence of Jewish Existence and Belief*. (New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1992), 178

## TRANSLITERATION

*Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, borei p'ri hagafen.*

*Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'ratzah vanu, v'Shabbat kodsho b'ahavah uv'ratzon hinchilanu, zikaron l'maaseih v'reishit. Ki hu yom t'chilah l'mikra-ei kodesh, zecher litziat Mitzrayim. Ki vanu vacharta, v'otanu kidashta, mikol haamim. V'Shabbat kodsh'cha b'ahavah uv'ratzon hinchaltanu. Baruch atah, Adonai, m'kadeish haShabbat.*

## TRANSLATION

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, Creator of the fruit of the vine. Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who finding favor with us, sanctified us with *mitzvot*. In love and favor, You made the holy Shabbat our heritage as a reminder of the work of Creation. As first among our sacred days, it recalls the Exodus from Egypt. You chose us and set us apart from the peoples. In love and favor You have given us Your holy Shabbat as an inheritance. Blessed are You, Adonai, who sanctifies Shabbat.

**HAMOTZI...** Following the Kiddush, the hands can be washed in a ritually prescribed manner. The actual washing can be accomplished by either moving to a sink or passing a bowl of water around the table. Once the hand washing ritual is complete, the challah cover is removed from the two loaves of challah (two in memory of the double portion of manna received by the Israelites in the wilderness), and *Hamotzi* — the blessing over the bread — is recited. The challah is then cut or broken, and distributed to each person. The following is the Hamotzi blessing:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם המוציא לחם מן הארץ

### **TRANSLITERATION**

*Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, hamotzi lechem min haaretz.*

### **TRANSLATION**

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who brings forth bread from the earth.

**BLESSING THE CHILDREN...**If children are present at the gathering, this ritual can be extremely powerful and can offer a wonderful opportunity for the children to play a key role in welcoming the Shabbat. Some families bless their children one by one while others may choose to bless them all at once. Traditionally, the parents will put their hands on the child's head and give the child a blessing.

For boys, the introductory line is:

יְשִׁימְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּאֶפְרַיִם וְכַמְנַשֶּׁה

### **TRANSLITERATION**

*Yesimcha Elohim k'Ephraim v'chi-Menashe.*

**TRANSLATION** - May you be like Ephraim and Menashe.

For girls, the introductory line is:

יְשִׁימְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּשָׂרָה רַבֵּקָה רַחֵל וְלֵאָה

### **TRANSLITERATION**

*Yesimech Elohim k'Sarah Rivka Rachel v'Leah*

## TRANSLATION

May you be like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

For both boys and girls, the rest of the blessing is:

יְבָרַכְךָ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ

יָאֵר יְהוָה פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחַנְךָ

יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם

## TRANSLITERATION

*Yivarechecha Adonai v'yishmerecha*

*Ya'er Adonai panav eilecha vichuneka*

*Yisa Adonai panav eilecha v'yasem lecha shalom*

## TRANSLATION

May God bless you and guard you.

May God show you favor and be gracious to you.

May God show you kindness and grant you peace.

Most parents give each child a kiss after they are blessed.

## SONGS AROUND THE TABLE...

Singing songs around the Friday night table is often one of the highlights of the Kabbalat Shabbat experience as it allows, and even requires, great joy. In a sense, it allows for those around the table to “let their guard down” and express themselves in ways that dialogue may not. Not everyone, however, is comfortable with singing so

care should be taken to encourage various forms of participation. Clapping, pounding the table, clinking the glass, and calling out page numbers are just a few ways to engage all participants and make them feel part of this activity.

It would be difficult to imagine a Kabbalat Shabbat gathering without the inclusion of Shalom Alechem: “Peace Be Upon You.” This traditional song, usually sung right before dinner and right after candle lighting, tells us that on Shabbat, two angels come to stay with us. *Shalom Alechem*, is sung as a way to welcome in the angelic spirits. with the following lyrics: “May your coming be in peace,” “Bless me with peace,” and “May your departure be in peace.” Another way to think of this song is that it is a way of bringing in the Shabbat spirit of harmony, well being and gratitude. It usually is the very first song sung around the table, signaling the guests around the table to pause from their conversations and join in this collective activity.

For a selection of additional songs that can be sung around the Shabbat table, the Aish website has much to choose from.<sup>51</sup>

**THE MEAL...**Shabbat dinners are usually multi-coursed and include bread, fish, soup, meat and/or poultry, side dishes, and dessert. While menus can vary widely, some traditional foods are Shabbat favorites.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.aish.com/sh/s/53388492.html>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.thespruceeats.com/essential-jewish-dishes-4149436>

**BIRKAT HAMAZON...**the blessing after the meal, is also known as “benching,” the English version of the Yiddish term bentshn, which means to bless. This blessing (which is actually a series of blessings) is mandated for use following any meal in which bread has been eaten, since according to Jewish law, eating bread officially constitutes a meal. Birkat Hamazon can be said sitting at the same table or in view of the same table where the meal was eaten. Reciting the blessing after the meal is a mitzvah written in the Torah. Deuteronomy 8:10 states, “And you shall eat and be satisfied, and bless Adonai your God for the good land which God has given you.” The following is the Birkat Hamazon:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
הָזֵן אֶת־הָעוֹלָם כֻּלּוֹ בְּטוֹבוֹ בְּחֵן בְּחֶסֶד  
וּבְרַחֲמִים, הוּא נוֹתֵן לֶחֶם לְכָל־בָּשָׂר  
כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֶסֶדּוֹ. וּבְטוֹבוֹ הַגָּדוֹל  
תָּמִיד לֹא חָסַר לָנוּ, וְאֵל יַחְסַר לָנוּ  
מִזֶּן לְעוֹלָם וָעֵד. בַּעֲבוּר שְׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל  
כִּי הוּא אֵל זֶן וּמַפְרִיֵּן לְכָל וּמְטִיב לְכָל  
וּמַכִּין מִזֶּן לְכָל־בְּרִיּוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, הָזֵן אֶת־הַכֹּל

## TRANSLITERATION

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, hazan et haolam kulo b'tuvo, b'chein b'chesed uv'rachamim. Hu notein lechem l'chol basar ki l'olam chasdo. Uv'tuvo hagadol tamid lo chasar lanu, v'al yechar lanu, mazon l'olam va-ed, baavur sh'mo hagadol. Ki hu El zan um'farneis lakol umeitiv lakol, umeichin mazon l'chol b'riyotav asher bara. Baruch atah Adonai, hazan et hakol.*



## **TRANSLATION**

Sovereign God of the universe, we praise You: Your goodness sustains the world. You are the God of grace, love, and compassion, the Source of bread for all who live; for Your love is everlasting. In Your great goodness we need never lack for food; You provide food enough for all. We praise You, O God, Source of food for all who live.

### **SESSION VI: Moving to the Altar; The Shabbat Dinner Table**

#### **CANDLE LIGHTING; ACTIVITY #1**

**KAVANAH:** To understand how powerful light in darkened places can be and the effect it can have when dealing with both minor, somewhat mundane issues in life as well as the much larger issues. Shabbat can be a time to focus our attention and our energies on such light.

**ACTIVITY:** Dim the room lighting as much as possible to allow for the lights from the Shabbat candle to illuminate the room. Allow the participants an ample amount of time to gaze at the candles in silence, allowing the light to speak to each participant in its own unique manner. After this meditative silence, facilitate a discussion on how just a bit of light can bring clarity to the darkest of spaces. Relate this to life and how our ancient teachings can bring much clarity to our lives, especially when we find ourselves in dark places.

**PREP:** Candles, lighter, matches

## **SESSION VI:** Moving to the Altar; The Shabbat Dinner Table

### **KIDDUSH; ACTIVITY #2**

**KAVANAH:** To explore the properties of a grape in order to appreciate the mundane, as well as the holiness, of the wine consumed during Kiddush. One of the many benefits of Shabbat is that it affords us the time to slow down and pay closer attention to the actions in our lives that we often take for granted and often go unnoticed.

**ACTIVITY:** The following script to be utilized for this Kiddush ritual is an experience of mindful eating from Linda Smith from Duke Integrative Medicine. As each participant is given a grape, they are to explore the grape in its entirety.

**PREP:** Grape, Mindful Eating script

Script: First take the grape and hold it between your pointer finger and thumb. Bring your attention to it, as if it were a novel item, imagining that you have never seen one before in your life. Take the time to observe the grape carefully - really see it - gaze at it with care and full attention. Let your eyes explore every part of it, noticing its shape, colors, and surfaces. Examine its grooves, where the light shines and shadows. Rotate and move the grape between your fingers, continuing to explore its texture. Apply a small bit of pressure to notice whether it is soft or hard. You might close your eyes if that helps you to focus and enhance your sense of touch. Recognizing this is a grape, note any thoughts you might have about grapes - any memories about them or feelings of liking or disliking them. Hold the grape under your nose, and inhale naturally. With each in-breath, notice any aroma or smell that arises. Bring awareness also to any effect in your mouth or stomach. Now bring the grape slowly up to your mouth,

noticing how your hand and arm know exactly how and where to position it. Being aware if you are salivating as the mind and body anticipate eating. Place the grape gently into your mouth, without yet chewing. Hold the grape in your mouth for at least 10 seconds, exploring it with your tongue, feeling the sensations of having it there. Notice this pause and how it feels to take some time before eating the raisin.

When you are ready, prepare to chew the grape. Take one or two bites into it and notice what happens, bringing your full attention to its taste and texture as you continue chewing. Take time to chew without swallowing, noticing the taste and texture of the grape in your mouth and how it may change over time. When you feel ready to swallow the grape, bring awareness to the sensation so that even this is experienced consciously. Lastly, notice what is left of the grape as you swallow and it travels down to your stomach. Notice how your body as a whole is feeling after completing this exercise.

Now take a few moments to write down your reflections on the following questions:

1. How was this experience the same or different from how you normally eat?
2. What, if anything, surprised you about the experience?
3. What did you notice with the grape in terms of sight, touch, sound, smell, and taste?
4. What thoughts or memories popped up while doing this exercise?
5. What is one tip for yourself that you are going to take from this experience to apply to your eating habits in the future?<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> <https://www.dukeintegrativemedicine.org/dukeimprogrmsblog/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2017/08/Mindful-Eating-Transcript>.

**SESSION VI: Moving to the Altar; The Shabbat Dinner Table**

**HAMOTZI; ACTIVITY #3**

**KAVANAH:** To explore the destructive power of causing embarrassment to another person. The sweetness of Shabbat harmony can be explored through this activity.

**ACTIVITY:** Since our tradition teaches that the challah is covered so as not to cause it embarrassment as the wine is blessed first, a discussion on respect is conducted and the lengths one should go to prevent causing one to be embarrassed.

**PREP:** None

**SESSION VI: Moving to the Altar; The Shabbat Dinner Table**

**BLESSING THE CHILDREN; ACTIVITY #4**

**KAVANAH:** To engage the children in the Kabbalat Shabbat experience and to enlighten the adults with views from a child's perspective.

**ACTIVITY:** Prior to Friday night, ask children to prepare a drawing, writing, song, etc. that incorporates the following ideas: weekly Torah portion, the meaning of Torah / Judaism in their life, something special that happened that week, something special happening in the week ahead, etc. These should then be shared at the table throughout the dinner.

**PREP:** Instructions given to children prior to gathering.

**SESSION VI:** Moving to the Altar; The Shabbat Dinner Table

**BIRKAT HAMZON; ACTIVITY #5**

**KAVANAH:** To explore the concept of gratefulness after a full meal with family and friends. There can be no more special time than Shabbat to express feelings of gratefulness for a day dedicated to sweet introspection and harmonious experiences, both individually and communally.

**ACTIVITY:** After the blessing is recited, have participants write one or two sentences addressed to a fellow participant thanking them for sharing this holy time together. These should be in the form of a specific thank you sentiment, highlighting something that may have been said or done during the Kabbalat Shabbat experience.

**PREP:** Slips of “Thank You” papers.

**END OF SESSION VI**

**SESSION VII:** The Results of the Friday Night Kabbalat Shabbat Experience

- The possibility of true transformation
- Shalom Bayit; the effects on family and the home
- Personal Reflections

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Now the heavens and the earth were completed and all their host. And God completed on the seventh day His work that He did, and He abstained on the seventh day from all His work that He did. And God blessed the seventh day and He hallowed it, for thereon He abstained from all His work that God created to do.<sup>54</sup>

The very beginning of the Torah spells out the uniqueness of the day called Shabbat. It is this day that the Torah calls kadosh, holy, and is, interestingly enough, the very first time we see that word. According to the creation account in the Book of Genesis, all of creation that occurred prior to this day, waters, plants, animals, humans, although also created by God, were not referred to as holy. This alone should suggest that Shabbat can allude to something beyond our limited understanding. It is on this day that we, as humans, can strive to be more than we were before the day began. And it is this very goal that encourages us to move from who we were to the endless possibility of who we can be.

If Shabbat is given authentic attention, there is reason to believe that it can truly have an effect not just on the individual, but on the entire community that individual affects. It may not be a stretch to expect that, if an entire family is involved in a Kabbalat Shabbat experience on a regular basis, shalom bayit - peace in the home, can be achieved. It most probably won't occur immediately but, if Friday night can be set aside on a regular basis for the sole purpose of exploring something bigger than

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<sup>54</sup> Genesis 2:1-3

ourselves, true transformation is likely to be attained as all will be forced to encounter themselves and each other in ways not often afforded in today's fast-paced society.

**SESSION VII:** The Results of the Friday Night Kabbalat Shabbat Experience

**PERSONAL REFLECTIONS; ACTIVITY #1**

**KAVANAH:** To afford the opportunity for reflection in order to take note of the entire experience and put it into words.

**ACTIVITY:** Allow time at the very end of this experience for participants to share their thoughts on the experience. They may speak to the transformative aspects of any one particular activity and/or ritual as well as the peace it may have brought them.

**PREP:** None.

**SESSION VII:** The Results of the Friday Night Kabbalat Shabbat Experience

**PERSONAL REFLECTIONS; ACTIVITY #2**

**KAVANAH:** To maintain a sense of shared experience and to extend the experience past Friday evening.

**ACTIVITY:** If all agree, provide addresses of all participants along with blank greeting cards with envelopes. Encourage participants to write or draw their thoughts, wishes, encouraging statements, etc. on greeting cards during the upcoming week and send these cards to as many participants as they wish. The written and/or drawn messages can incorporate specific blessings that include key concepts covered throughout the entirety of the gathering. A "planning worksheet" should be provided to the participants listing some of the key concepts explored such as forgiveness, shalom bayit, gratitude,



joy, peace, light, encountering and welcoming the Divine etc. Since this activity calls for the blank greeting cards to be created at home well after the actual gathering takes place, this final activity is highly beneficial as it allows for participants to reflect on and note their precise thoughts and wishes while the event is still fresh in their minds. Thus, the planning worksheet will act as a resource to refer to when actually creating the greeting cards.

**PREP:** Participant addresses, greeting cards and planning worksheet.

**END OF SESSION VII**

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