

# GATHER THE PEOPLE

Torah-Based Community Organizing and Development

[www.gatherthepeople.org](http://www.gatherthepeople.org)

## FAMILY SIDDUR STUDY: LESSON PLAN 2

### **LAST WEEK WE TALKED ABOUT HOW תּשַׁבּת IS A VERY SPECIAL TIME.**

- We said Jewish tradition teaches us that on תּשַׁבּת we should not do any of the work we usually do during the week.
- That it's a time when we have an opportunity to see what the world would be like if everyone was on their best behavior, at least being fair and kind to everyone else.
- That we should do this on תּשַׁבּת so we can see what's possible the other six days in the week.
- And that we go to synagogue to be with other people who are also trying to be better people, to help make the world a better place.
- *Do you have relatives, friends or acquaintances who try to be better people so they can help make the world a better place for everyone, not just themselves—and if so, how are they different from other people? What specifically do they do differently?*

### **LET'S TALK ABOUT THE FRIDAY NIGHT SERVICES.**

- Maybe you noticed that I said *services*, which is because there's more than one service on Friday night, although it may at first seem like there's only one service because they're done together.
- The first service we have is called קַבֵּלַת שַׁבָּת, which means “welcoming the Sabbath.”
  1. *What might it mean to “welcome שַׁבָּת”? What do we do to prepare to welcome a guest into our home? How do we change our own behavior for the occasion?* [PREPARE TO ACCEPT THE GUIDELINES FOR תּשַׁבּת AND THE GOOD THINGS THAT COME FROM ACCEPTING THEM]
  2. *Why would we need a special service just to welcome שַׁבָּת?* [GET HELP IN LETTING GO OF OUR RESISTANCE BEHAVING DIFFERENTLY TO WELCOME SHABBAT]
  3. In just a moment or so we'll talk about the particular prayers in the קַבֵּלַת שַׁבָּת service.
- The second service on Friday night is מַעֲרִיב, which means “evening.”

- These are the prayers that Jews all over the world are praying every Friday evening.
- ***Why should we care that Jews all over the world are praying the same prayers that we're praying here?***
  1. As Jews we share a common history of being attacked simply because we're Jewish.
  2. That we pray the same prayers means that we more or less share the same belief in God and what God requires of us, which unifies us as a people.
  3. Because of that unity, we're much more able as a whole people to defend our rights and our safety and security, like from the current violent anti-Semitism we're experiencing in the U.S. and elsewhere.
- And in the coming weeks we'll be talking about the meanings of the prayers we Jews pray all over the world.

**USUALLY THE FIRST THING WE SING ON FRIDAY NIGHT IS שְׂפָא נְפִשׁ, WHICH MEANS “BELOVED OF THE SOUL.”**

- “Beloved of the soul” is another way of saying that the deepest part of me, my soul, loves God.
- ***But what is the soul—how can we understand that part of ourselves?***
- The simplest explanation is that it's the part of us, given to us by the Creator of All, God—the part of us that can figure out the difference between right and wrong, and that wants to do what's right according to the Torah.
- Our tradition teaches that our body is the “herald of the soul,” which is a way of saying that how we use our body, whether to do what's right or what's wrong, reveals the character of our soul.
- This is true because our soul, the part of us that wants to do what God asks of us, directs how we use our body.
- Because God entrusts our soul with the care of every other human being, which places a great responsibility on us, it's said that our tears are the sweat of the soul at work.
- If we take on this difficult work, we can easily understand why the main idea in the שְׂפָא נְפִשׁ prayer is that we must love God *a lot*.
- As a practical matter, that means we must love the way God asks us to live, obeying the מצוות, the commandments, because they make us better human beings and bring happiness to us and others we care about.
- This is not complicated: for example, God asks us not to lie, and we live happier lives when we always tell the truth to one another—although sometimes it's very difficult to be truthful.

- *When you love someone very much, what kinds of things do you want to do for them? Don't we want to please them, to do what they want us to do?*
- So we want to please God, which means to do what God wants us to do?
- *And how do we know what God wants us to do?* [WE STUDY TORAH]
- So when we begin the service and sing שְׂפֵי נְדָבָה, we may be thinking to ourselves:
  1. Given all the things that are happening in my life right now—in school, on the job, at home, what can I do to please God?
  2. And as you pray in the rest of the service, the prayers will help you to figure out how you should act towards other people in your life.
- So that's how we begin the Friday evening service.

**BUT THEN SOMETHING HAPPENS WHICH MAKES US FEEL VERY DIFFERENTLY.**

- The next prayer in the service, which begins with לְכוּ נִרְנְנָה לַיהוָה, is Psalm 95, one of the beautiful “songs to God” that we believe was written by King David.
- You may know that David also killed the giant Goliath with his slingshot.
- As you can see, the very first thing we sing in this prayer is לְכוּ נִרְנְנָה לַיהוָה, “Come let us sing joyfully to God.”
- So at the beginning of תְּפִלָּה we may *choose* to be very happy.
- *But what if things aren't going well in our life, or if we had a bad week or a bad day on Friday? How can we just choose to be happy?*
- Of course, when things don't go well, often we have to deal with *why*, with what caused a bad situation.
- But this prayer tells us that, at the beginning of תְּפִלָּה, we can choose to sing joyfully to God even if things aren't going well in our life.
- *But what is joy?*
  1. Joy happens when our emotions and our intelligence and our spirit are all deeply touched.
  2. When we may want to laugh and cry at the same time because the experience, for most of us, is so rare and beautiful.
- **So, despite our problems and disappointments, we can begin תְּפִלָּה by remembering:**
  1. We can choose to recall all in God's creation that has brought us joy, including of course people we have known who have brought light and love into our lives, and we can choose to feel some of that joyfulness in the moment.
  2. We can also choose to think of all the kindness people show to one another, think of all the beautiful animals, think of our beloved pets,

think of all the beautiful trees and flowers, the mountains and oceans—all are God’s creation that can bring us the experience of joy.

- ***Are there any beautiful things in your life, little things or big things, that bring you joy?***
- ***If not, why do you think that’s true—why don’t you have those things—what’s getting in the way of having joy in your life?***
- It’s good to remember that God—who teaches us how to live joyfully through the Torah—has kept the Jewish people alive for 3,000 years and remains our protector even today.
- When we do what the Torah teaches—we find the “שְׂמֵחָה שֶׁל מִצְוָה,” the “joy of the commandment,” simply by doing what God asks of us.
- If you haven’t been doing that, give it a try—your life will certainly improve and you will like it!

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