

Conversation Guide for Participants

WELCOME

We begin, as Jewish gatherings do, with a blessing for our time together:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסוֹק בְּצִרְכֵי צְבוּר:

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech haolam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu la'asok b'tzorchei tzibur.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who sanctifies us through mitzvot and has commanded us to engage with the needs of the community.

Now, let's review the *derech erez* – the shared understanding of how we will interact – that animates our time together. “*Derech erez*” (דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ) is a Hebrew phrase that literally means “way of the land.” In common speech, it means courtesy, respect, or good manners. By having a shared understanding of how we will interact, we create a safe space for meaningful conversation and deep listening.

Our *derech erez* describes how we apply [Temple Beth Am's values](#) in the setting of our Elul Group conversations:

Inclusion: We honor differences, and do not make assumptions. We listen to each other and make room for every voice. We are kind to ourselves and one another.

Inspiration: The month of Elul is a time for *cheshbon hanefesh* – an accounting of the soul. As we engage in these conversations, we make ourselves vulnerable and open to new ways of seeing ourselves and others.

Purpose: What we do matters in the world. As we explore Jewish values through the lens of these conversations, we also explore how we can better align our actions with those values.

Engagement: We are fully present, eliminating distractions so that we can focus on the conversation and each other.

Curiosity: We are open to trying new things and going outside of our comfort zone. We agree to disagree and address any conflict directly and with kindness. We ask and respect questions.

Responsibility: We engage in these conversations to strengthen our connection to one another and our Temple Beth Am community. We will not share others' stories outside this conversation, although we may share what we have learned from this experience.

How Do You Recharge?



ASK AND SHARE

Thank you for joining our conversation. Please think of one thing that helps you refill your sense of joy, restfulness, and energy when you feel depleted or run-down. What helps you feel recharged? Take a moment to think about this question, and then we'll share our responses.

LEARN

The Jewish tradition has had a designated rest time since, well, the very beginning. In the Torah, the story of the creation of the world ends with a day of rest – a set-apart time. Later descriptions of *Shabbat*, the Sabbath day, make it clear that everyone in the community is meant to rest – not only those with privilege, but workers, the stranger passing through, and even the animals! Judaism considers it an important activity; elsewhere, the Torah talks about the act of *shabbat v'yinafash*, resting and restoring oneself. *Nefesh* means “soul” in Hebrew, so this kind of resting is a sort of a re-souling, a recharging of one’s soul, or spirit. Many believe that doing so is indispensable; the secular Zionist essayist Ahad Ha-Am once wrote, “More than the Jewish people have preserved *Shabbat*, *Shabbat* has preserved the Jewish people.”

Our culture has shifted towards increased technological connection and, often with it, an expectation that people will respond to any kind of work request even late at night and early in the morning, seven days a week. And now that we’re living with the COVID-19 pandemic, venturing out as little as possible, many of us have lost the boundaries that distinguished different parts of our lives. As a result of all this, we don’t often have a chance to rest or recharge – to stop *doing* so much and to just *be*.

An organization called Reboot put together a “[Sabbath Manifesto](#)” with ten key principles designed to help people slow down and bring the spirit of Shabbat into their lives. The ten principles are:

1. Avoid technology
2. Connect with loved ones
3. Nurture your health
4. Get outside
5. Avoid commerce
6. Light candles
7. Drink wine
8. Eat bread
9. Find silence
10. Give back

How Do You Recharge?



Interpretive Questions

- Do you see any patterns emerge from the items on the list? Are there one or several unifying principles?
- What sort of experience do these actions seem to encourage?
- Which of these principles seem communal? Solitary?

Reflective Questions

- When do you feel that you need to recharge?
- Which of the principles from the Reboot list are you most drawn to? Why?
- Do any of them challenge you or make you feel uncomfortable? If so, what makes them uncomfortable or challenging?
- Is there something missing from the list that you think should be there?
- If you were to update this list to account for the COVID pandemic, (how) would it change?

PERSPECTIVES FROM JEWISH TRADITION

Let's go deeper into the Jewish tradition to better understand these questions around recharging. Here is a text from the Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 12a, in which the students of Shammai and Hillel disagree over whether it is permitted to perform certain activities on Shabbat.

וְכֵן הָיָה רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר אוֹמֵר מְשׁוּם רַבּוֹן שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל : אֵין מְשַׁדְּכִין אֶת הַתֵּינוּקוֹת לְאָרֶס, וְלֹא אֶת הַתֵּינוּקָה לְלַמְדוֹ סֵפֶר וּלְלַמְדוֹ אוֹמָנוּת, וְאֵין מְנַחֲמִין אֲבֵלִים, וְאֵין מְבַקְרִין חוֹלִין בְּשַׁבָּת, דְּבַרֵּי בֵּית שְׁמַאי. וּבֵית הַלֵּל מַתִּירִין .

תָּנּוּ רַבָּנָן, הַנִּכְנָס לְבֵקֵר אֶת הַחוֹלָה אוֹמֵר : "שַׁבָּת הִיא מְלַזְעוֹק, וְרַפּוּאָה קְרוּבָה לְבֵא". וְרַבִּי מֵאִיר אוֹמֵר : "יְכוּלָה הִיא שְׁתַּרְחֵם".

And Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar would also say in the name of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel: One may not make matches for the children, to betroth them on Shabbat, and one may not enter into an agreement to take the child and teach him to read a sacred book or to teach him a trade, and one may not comfort mourners on Shabbat, and one may not visit the sick on Shabbat, this is the statement of Beit Shammai, as in their opinion, those are weekday activities and not appropriate on Shabbat. And Beit Hillel permit performing all of these activities on Shabbat, as they each include an aspect of mitzva.

The Sages taught in a *baraita*: One who enters to visit a sick person on Shabbat does not address him in the manner customary during the week; rather, he says: It is on Shabbat that it is prohibited to cry out and ask for compassion, and healing is soon to come. And Rabbi Meir says that it is appropriate to add: The merit of Shabbat is capable of engendering compassion.

How Do You Recharge?



Interpretive Questions

- Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel appear to be focusing on different aspects of these activities. How would you describe the principles they each rely on?
- Does the second paragraph align more with Beit Shammai or Beit Hillel?

Reflective Questions

- How would / does distinguishing between “weekday activities” and “Shabbat activities” help you recharge?
- Does performing a mitzva or showing compassion help you to recharge? Can you give an example?

How Do You Recharge?



DO

We all need time to pause and to recharge. Reflective time allows us to restore our energy, to gestate on questions rather than to react immediately to them, to see the bigger picture, to give our creativity a little bit of breathing room. Then when we move forward into our regular lives, we do so with a renewed sense of vigor, excitement, perspective, and insight. But, especially these days, it's rare that reflective time just lands in our laps. We have to make the decision to give it to ourselves. We have to choose to recharge.

As we conclude the conversation, here are a few final questions to consider.

- What's one insight that you've gained from this conversation?
- What is one action you might take, or practice you might try, before we meet next time, based on what you're taking from this conversation?
- What's one obstacle to taking that action? How can you overcome it? Who might you need help from in order to do so?
- What could we do together as a community based on what we talked about today?

Please take a moment to think about these questions, and if you'd like, to share them with the group.

Thank you for being part of this conversation.