

The 4th Commandment – *Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.*

Addressing Shabbat Observance at TBR

Ritual Committee 2010 -'11

VP of Religion – Sharon Weiss; Ritual Chair – Nancy Cole

The inception:

Last year it was brought to the attention of the ritual committee by the Rabbi and the VP of Religion, Mark Niederman, that protocols at Temple Beth Rishon during Shabbat were inconsistent with the tenet that Shabbat is separate and different from the rest of the week.

Questions we asked:

The Sabbath, the seventh day of the week was set apart by God as a time of rest and spiritual rejuvenation. The ritual committee grappled with the following questions:

- How do we at TBR, a non – denominational Jewish House of Worship, understand this commandment and its role in our assimilated, predominantly secular lives?
- How can we as liberal Jews maintain the spirit and sanctity of Shabbat within the walls of our synagogue?
- What are our responsibilities as Jews to keep this Commandment? How can we make the Shabbat holy?

Our objectives:

- Raise the awareness among our congregants of this holiest of Jewish holidays
- Raise the consciousness of our congregants about the significance of Shabbat. “More than Israel has kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept Israel.”
- Educate about the commandment to separate this 7th day from all other days.
- Encourage the pursuit of spiritual renewal in our lives.
- Strengthen Shabbat observance at TBR by offering a variety of Shabbat experiences: Home Hospitality Shabbat, Tot Shabbat
- Define our observance by what we do, rather than allowing others to define us by what we do not do (a post denominational concept)
- Find our balance between strict Orthodox observance and secular realities that best serves our heterogeneous demographic.
- Distinguish between public posture and private, individual behaviors with respect to Shabbat observance (*ma'rit ayn*)
- Distinguish between the concepts of “holy” and “profane.”

The process:

- At 4 consecutive ritual committee meetings we educated ourselves, shared personal perspectives about how we can raise awareness of the importance of Shabbat observance at TBR.
- Rabbi educated the committee about “The Nature of Shabbat;” we examined a Reform Movement response: The Synagogue Thrift Shop and Shabbat, a reading Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice by Rabbi Mark Washofsky; we personally reflected upon quotes from Abraham Joshua Heschel’s The Sabbath.
- A sub-committee (Rabbi Emert, Sharon Weiss, Cyrile Wilson, Irwin Tessler) convened and prepared a framework for our recommendations based on the committee’s discussion and input.
- The committee reviewed, modified, and accepted these recommendations to be presented to the Board of Trustees.

The outcome:

The ritual committee has proposed initial recommendations to be followed within the confines of the synagogue that reinforce that our community recognizes the Shabbat as a holy day, separate and different from the rest of the week. The committee recommends that the guideline document be provided to all lay leadership and committee members with other orientation materials. The document should be posted on our website, distributed with pre-school packets, Bar and Bat Mitzvah packets and other appropriate venues.