

Temple Bnai Israel Shabbat Policy

The Ritual Committee studied the origin and meaning of Shabbat and Shabbat practice. We hope to bring an inclusive, meaningful Shabbat practice to the Temple Bnai Israel community.

Shabbat is more than a day of rest. It is also a day of joy when we celebrate and seek to enhance holiness and delight as we consider the meaning of God, Judaism, and the world in which we participate.

Unfortunately, many Jews have learned to associate “real” Shabbat practice with a list of proscriptions. As a result, we may feel guilty when we think about how our Shabbat practice differs from some ideal which our more traditional forbears supposedly embraced.

We want to embrace some traditional practices and want to express them as part of a program of blessing, community, and justice. Further, some of us have learned to embrace the avoidance of certain activities on Shabbat as an important, freeing part of a positive package of “spiritual practice.” Like Haiku, the Japanese poetry style that limits each poem to 17 syllables, limiting certain activities on Shabbat can enhance, rather than limit, our creative expression and sense of peace.

In developing a Shabbat policy, the Ritual Committee followed a series of principles that we hope express both the vision in Exodus of celebrating creation, but not creating, and the vision in Deuteronomy of resting (not working), and allowing others to rest. These principles grew out of our study and seem to us to be a wholehearted, yet modern, response to our tradition.

The principles include the following:

1. We celebrate Shabbat in and of itself. On Shabbat we do those things in which we take delight and which add to its holiness. Because it is set aside for special attention, on Shabbat we do not prepare for, or produce anything in preparation for, the days beyond Shabbat. This is how we define the traditional prohibition against production (“issur m’lakhah”).
2. We try to be inclusive and to avoid imposing discomfort on others in our community by avoiding practices that will offend.
3. We honor Shabbat by making sure that everyone has a day of rest. Those Jews whom we employ may work as part of Shabbat celebration, as our rabbi does, but no one should work seven days a week. We require no one, Jew or non-Jew, to work seven days a week.

4. Celebration of Shabbat may supersede some biblical prohibitions. The only biblical Shabbat prohibition is against fire. After study, the Ritual Committee concluded that using a stove *for Shabbat* is acceptable in order to enhance the Shabbat celebration. Further, we concluded that *electricity is not fire*. Thus, we may use it for anything that is not otherwise prohibited in this policy.
5. On Shabbat, we avoid commerce and the objectification of people. By objectification, we mean using people as tools – that is in the roles they perform in the work-a-day world.

Applications of these principles at Temple Bnai Israel include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. Using the stove in the synagogue kitchen on Shabbat for the preparation of food to be consumed that day is permitted.
- b. While cooking food on Shabbat, for use on Shabbat, is permitted, purchasing food (or other things) on Shabbat is not.
- c. Food cooked at the synagogue on Shabbat, but not consumed, should be given to charity.
- d. Crafts and other activities are permitted on Shabbat when the activity is focused solely on process, not product. Activities at the synagogue on Shabbat should include options to meet members' varied practices.
- e. Taking photos and/or videos on Shabbat, which are production for the future, is not permitted at synagogue, but we can show movies.
- f. People may light candles at Friday night Shabbat services after sunset, but Havdalah occurs only after three stars appear in the sky; thus non-Shabbat activities cannot begin until that time. This is because Havdalah ends Shabbat; thus this practice will allow all to end Shabbat at the same time.

