When midnight comes on December 31st, much of the attention of the world will focus on that as a turning point marking the end not only of one year, one decade, or even one century on the calendar, but of a millennium. Though American Jews live in a world organized in large part around the dates mapped out on the conventional calendar, there are elements which make the passage of the millennium special to our Christian friends and neighbors which do not directly apply to us. On the other hand, there are also uniquely Jewish ways for noting the passage of time and marking specific days. The fact that December 31, 1999, falls on a Friday and January 1, 2000, on a Saturday provides us the opportunity to explore the Jewish approach to time while following the generations who have preceded us by celebrating Shabbat, which returns weekly.

In cooperation with the Synagogue/Federation Commission of Metropolitan Chicago, the Chicago Board of Rabbis, the Associated Talmud Torahs, and the Community Foundation for Jewish Education, we are thus extremely pleased to bring the community these suggestions for observing this “Century Shabbat” at home. We are especially happy to be doing so in connection with an anniversary of our own, for the year 2000 will mark the centennial of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago.

The organization that evolved into today’s Federation was established in April, 1900, by forward-looking community leaders as a vehicle for addressing the needs of the growing Jewish community of the day. They created a dynamic instrument for serving Jews at home and abroad and for forging a unified Jewish community. Thus, this December 31st, as we reflect on the end of an extraordinarily dramatic century for the Jewish people, we initiate a yearlong commemoration, through exhibits, programs, conferences and printed materials, of the community’s past one hundred years, the first one hundred years for our Federation.

As the turn-of-the-last-century writer known as Ahad Ha’am said, more than the Jewish people have kept the Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jewish people. These materials on the observance of Shabbat are emblematic of our community’s commitment to the traditions and values which have held us together as a people through the centuries. We hope that you will find them useful as you and your family usher in Shabbat on December 31st, and that they will prove meaningful to you for many Shabbatot to come.

Shabbat in the beginning

When in the beginning of G-d’s creation of heaven and earth, the earth being unformed and void with darkness on the face of the raging deep, and the spirit of G-d hovering over the water’s surface... (Genesis: 1:1-2)

Shabbat embodies many basic Jewish values. It expresses a commitment to family and a belief that rest is essential to human well-being.

Once a week, we commemorate the Exodus from Egypt. As our ancestors left slavery behind, we leave the workweek behind.

The first time the Torah mentions Shabbat is in the beginning. And it is to creation and the Torah’s first reference to Shabbat that we now return.

Chaos, darkness, raging deep waters, hovering homeless G-d, emptiness, chaos. In the beginning, there was no beginning but only chaos. The purpose of creation is to bring order and harmony and peace out of chaos. It takes six days of creation to do this.

From chaos to order and harmony-the symmetry is exquisite. On each of the six days of creation, day by day, chaos is banished. On each of the first three days, G-d creates the setting for what will be created on each of the next three days. What is created on day one sets the stage for what is created on day four; the light is the stage for sun, moon, and stars. Days two and five, and days three and six have the same relationship: sky and sea for the fish and fowl, dry land for animals and people. And the partner of Shabbat is the Jewish people.

And the heaven and the earth were completed ...(Genesis 2:2)

Creation is complete when chaos is banished. The Hebrew word shabbat means an end, a cessation. What has ended is chaos. Shabbat is sacred because it is the first day without chaos. G-d gives this perfect world to His partners, humanity, whose task it is to maintain the harmony and order. Shabbat, at its simplest and most essential, is a weekly re-creation of that first moment of perfection.

At Home and in the Synagogue on Shabbat

In the year 70 C.E. the Beit HaMikdash, the Temple in Jerusalem, was destroyed by the Roman legions, under the Emperor Vespasian and his general Titus. The Jewish people went into exile. And, like anyone forced to leave home, they took with them their most precious possessions. Some of these possessions were transferred to the synagogue.

In the Temple in Jerusalem the Jewish people would gather to offer prayers and to hear the Torah read and taught. And so the synagogue became a Beit Knesset, a House of Communal Gathering, a Beit Tefila, House of Prayer, and a Beit Midrash, House of Study, in which was secured the Torah, the most precious possession of all. And, since that time, every Shabbat, Jews have gathered in the synagogue to hear the Torah read and taught and to pray together as a community.

At the same time, for two millennia every Jewish home in every land of exile, on every Shabbat, was transformed into a replica of the Temple in Jerusalem, with each Jew empowered as the priests of old, to celebrate with family the restored harmony of the world.

From the Beit HaMikdash, we take the altar for our Shabbat table. We took the golden seven-branch menorah for our Shabbat candlesticks. The bronze wash basin was continued in the ritual of handwashing. Wine brought for kiddush. And the weekly gift of twelve loaves, one for each tribe, was realized in the challah. As salt was used with each offering, we sprinkle salt on challah. And the blessing given by the kohanim, priests, to the nation is now recited by parents for their children on Shabbat.

It is almost two millennia since the Temple was destroyed. The Jewish people and Shabbat approach the end of this century together. Welcome to Century Shabbat! Welcome home!
Welcome to Century Shabbat

The twentieth century ends as we, the Jewish people, bring in Shabbat on Friday evening, December 31, 1999, just as we have been doing for the past century and for many centuries before that. It is the end of a century in the Gregorian calendar, not the Jewish calendar. But we the Jewish people are woven into this century. And what a century it has been for us. One hundred years ago, the world Jewish population was 10.6 million. By 1939 it grew to 16.6 million. Today, it stands at 12.5 million. We are a small people few in number. In this century, we have experienced great events of suffering and renewal that capture the imagination of the whole world.

There is no greater summons to fight evil and tyranny than the Holocaust that overtook our people. There is no greater inspiration to human initiative than our rescue and redemption of more than 1 million Soviet Jews.

We dedicate this Shabbat at the end of the century in a very special Jewish way. We mark the end of this momentous century, in the synagogue and at home, with family and friends, sitting around the Shabbat table, with all its beauty, love and holiness.

And now it is time for Shabbat to begin. CENTURY SHABBAT - AT HOME, is your family’s commemorative guide. In it you will find familiar prayers, poetry, stories, and songs with which we have been celebrating Shabbat for millennia. And in it you will find some additions conceived for this moment. This material can be used in its entirety for a Century Shabbat celebration, or selectively as part of your Shabbat observances.

Welcome home

Before candles are lit, and before light is brought to the world, there is an old tradition to begin Shabbat by first acting to redeem the world. A common way to do this is by helping others. It is customary to set aside a coin or two at this time, for those in need.

Acts of Righteousness

Tzedakah

Before candles are lit, and before light is brought to the world, there is an old tradition to begin Shabbat by first acting to redeem the world. A common way to do this is by helping others. It is customary to set aside a coin or two at this time, for those in need.

Candlelighting

And G-d said, Let there be light! And light banished the chaos of darkness. And later, in the desert between Egypt and the Promised Land, when our ancestors worshipped the Golden Calf and G-d’s presence was driven away, the golden menorah was kindled to bring back the presence. In 164 B.C.E., when the Maccabees entered the Temple in Jerusalem at Hanukkah time and found idols, they kindled the Menorah to bring back G-d’s presence. And so, every Shabbat since the destruction of the Temple, candles are lit to bring in G-d’s presence.

This is the single most significant act of preparation and dedication. Here are the steps:

1. Set the table with cloth, covered challah and kiddush cup.
2. Place at least two candlesticks on the table; some add one for each child.
3. Light the candles and set the matches aside.

Now look at the lights, close your eyes. Wave your hands three times, moving from a point close to the candles and far from you and bringing them in toward your eyes, while reciting the blessing. There is a tradition which says that this is a time when G-d is especially receptive to prayers for family and friends. Take advantage of this moment, and then open your eyes and say Shabbat Shalom to those around you.

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheynu melech ha-olam, asher kid-shanu b’mitzvotav, v’tzivanu l’hadlik neyr shel shabbat.

Praised are you, Lord our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, who has sanctified us with His Mitzvot and has commanded us to kindle the lights of Shabbat.

Birchat haBanim

Long ago, G-d instructed Moses to teach his brother Aaron, the first High Priest, to bless the Jewish people. Aaron’s children, the Kohanim, the priests, did this for centuries in the First and Second Temple. When the Temple was destroyed, parents became like kohanim, priests, blessing their children. In many homes this is done as the family gathers for Friday night dinner. Either parent places both his/her hands on each child’s head, recites the blessing below, and at the conclusion, exchanges hugs and kisses with greetings of Shabbat Shalom.

Y’simcha Elohim k’efra-yim v’chi-men- sheh

May G-d bless you as He blessed Ephraim and Menasheh

Y’simeych Elohim k’Sara, Rivka, Rachel, v’Leya

May G-d bless you as He blessed Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

Y’va-rech’cha Adonai v’yish-m’recha,Ya’eyr Adonai panav eyle-cha vi-chu-neka. Yisa m’recha,Y a’eyr Adonai panav eyle-cha.

May G-d bless you and keep you. May G-d shine His radiance upon you and show you favor. May G-d turn His Presence to you, and give you peace.

* In keeping with Jewish tradition, the names of G-d have not been written out in full in the Hebrew text. Rather, we have put in a Y for the Tetragrammaton name of G-d and we have spelled Eloheinu as Elokeinu. For the proper pronunciation of these names, see the transliteration.
We've been singing this welcome song for a long time. With this song, we bring in Shabbat. As the sun sets the light of Shabbat comes to the world. As we come home, an abiding spiritual presence accompanies us, each of us, to watch over us on our way home. And when we enter our homes and the table is set, and the candles are lit, we greet the angels who are as happy as we are to see Shabbat return ...by singing ... 


Shalom, peace be to you ministering angels, angels of the Most High, from the Ruler, the Ruler of Rulers, the Holy One, the One to be praised.

Come in peace, angels of peace, angels of the One Most High, from the Ruler, the Ruler of Rulers, the Holy One, the One to be praised. Bless me with peace, angels of peace, angels of the One Most High, from the Ruler, the Ruler of Rulers, the Holy One, the One to be praised.

Go in peace, angels of peace, angels of the One Most High, from the Ruler, the Ruler of Rulers, the Holy One, the One to be blessed.

Yom ha-shishi
Va-y’chulu ha-shama-yim v’ha-aretz v’chol tz’va-om Va-y’chal Elohim ba-yom ha-sh’vi-i m’lachto asher asa, Va-yish-bot ba-yom ha-sh’vi-i mi-kol m’lachto asher asa, Va-y’varech Elohim et yom ha-sh’vi-i va-y’kadeysh oto, Ki vo shavat mi-kol m’lachto asher bara Elohim la-asot Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheynu melech ha-olam, Borey p’ri ha-gafen.


Ki hu yom t’chila l’mik-ra-ey-kodesh Zecher liy-tzi-at mitz-ra-rim. Ki vanu vacharta v’otanu kidashhta mi-kol ha-amim, V’shabbat kod-sh’cha b’aha’ava uv-ratzon hin-chal-tanu

Baruch ata Adoni, m’kadeysh ha-shabbat.

And it was evening, and it was morning, the sixth day. The heavens and the earth and all that is in them were completed. And on the seventh day, God completed all the work that He had been doing. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it and distinguished it, for on it He stopped and rested from all His work of creation.

PRAISED ARE YOU, LORD OUR G-D, RULER OF THE UNIVERSE WHO CREATES THE FRUIT OF THE VINE.

Praised are you, Lord our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, who has sanctified us with His mitzvot-commandments. Who has favored us with His commandments and has desired us, and who has in love and favor given us His sacred Shabbat as an inheritance, a reminder of the work of creation. For this day is first among the sacred holidays, reminding us of the Exodus from Egypt. For You have chosen us and You have sanctified us from amongst all the nations, and in love and in favor, You have given us this sacred Shabbat as our inheritance. Praised are you G-d, who sanctifies the Shabbat.
In the Temple in Jerusalem, each Friday, twelve loaves of challah, one for each of the twelve tribes, was offered on Shabbat. Our challah commemorates that.

For forty years, Israel wandered in the desert and manna fell down from heaven and Israel was fed. Each day they collected the manna, except on Shabbat. On Friday a double portion of manna was given. To commemorate this, we use two challot on Shabbat.

Two special loaves of challah are placed under a challah cover when the table is set. At this moment, after kiddush, pick up the two loaves, recite the bracha together, remove the cover, cut or pull apart the challah, dip in salt, and distribute. The eating of challah with salt should not be done in haste; instead, savor the moment.

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheynu melech ha-olam, asher kid-shanu b’mitzvotav, v’tzivanu al neti-lat ya-da-im.

PRAISED ARE YOU LORD OUR G-D, WHO HAS SANCTIFIED US WITH HIS MITZVOT AND INSTRUCTED US ABOUT THE DEDICATION OF HANDS, THROUGH WASHING.

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Reflections on Shabbat

From the medrash (rabbinic writings):

Rabbi Eliezer said, “A person should always set a table filled with delights for the Shabbat evening meal, even if he or she needs but a bit of food to satisfy himself.”

Rabbi Shimon ben Yocha'i taught that Shabbat, the Sabbath, spoke up, directly to G-d: “Master of the Universe, each one of the days has a mate (the six weekdays make three couples), but I am alone, I have no mate or partner.” G-d replied “I have a partner for you, My people, the Jewish people, will be your mate and partner.” And when Israel stood before Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, G-d said to them, “Remember that special thought that I told the Shabbat, the Sabbath,” that “My people, the Jewish people, will be your mate and partner.” And then the Jewish people understood the meaning of the verse in the Ten Commandments, “Remember the Shabbat day to make it holy and special.” Exodus. 20:8. “Remember it, how? Remember by becoming its partner.”

“And G-d blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.” (Gen. 2:3) G-d blessed Shabbat, the Sabbath day with a special radiance given to the faces of men, women, and children on Shabbat. For the radiance on a person’s face on the weekdays is not like that on the Shabbat, Sabbath.

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Ha-Motzi

Blessing for the Challah

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Baruch at Adonai, Eloheynu melech ha-olam, ha-mo-tzi le-chem min ha-aretz.

Praised are you Lord our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

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Enjoy your Shabbat dinner!

From Abraham Joshua Heschel (20th Century)

Freedom
To set apart one day a week for freedom: a day on which we would not use the instruments which have been so easily turned into weapons of destruction; a day for being with ourselves; a day of detachment from the vulgar, of independence from external obligations; a day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization; a day of armistice in the economic struggle with our fellow men and the forces of nature—is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for man’s progress than the Sabbath?

Island of Stillness
In the tempestuous ocean of time and toil there are islands of stillness where man may enter a harbor and reclaim his dignity. The island is the seventh day, the Sabbath, a day of detachment from things, instruments, and practical affairs as well as of attachment to the spirit.

Holiness in Time
The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world.

Like the priests of old in the Temple, we wash our hands not to clean them, but in order to purify them in life-giving waters.

Holding the laver, or washing cup, in the left hand (any utensil can be used), pour water once on the right hand and then do the same for the left. Recite the blessing while drying the hands. In order to retain focus, silence is maintained until after ha-motzi and the challah is eaten.

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheynu melech ha-olam, asher kid-shanu b’mitz-votav, v’zivanu al neti-lat ya-da-im.

PRAISED ARE YOU LORD OUR G-D, WHO HAS SANCTIFIED US WITH HIS MITZVOT AND INSTRUCTED US ABOUT THE DEDICATION OF HANDS, THROUGH WASHING.

Netilat yadayim
Ritual Handwashing

Rabbi Eliezer said, “A person should always set a table filled with delights for the Shabbat evening meal, even if he or she needs but a bit of food to satisfy himself.”

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Enjoy your Shabbat dinner!
Different prayer books used by the Jewish people today present a variety of recitations by which to thank G-d for food and this meal. Each of them has at its core the following elements. Please note that what follows is not the classical version of the birkat hamazon, but an essential version. Should you wish to use a version more familiar to you, please turn to your own prayer book.

Baruch ata Adonai Eloheynu melech ha-olam, ha-zan et ha-olam kulo b’tuvo, b’cheyn b’chesed u-v’rachamim. Hu noteyn lechem l’chol basar, ki l’olam chasdo. U-v’tuvo ha-gadol tamid lo chasar lanu v’al yech-sar lanu mazon l’olam va-ed, ha-avur sh’mo ha-gadol ki hu Eyl zan u-m’far-neys la-kol u-mey-tiv la-kol, u-mey-tiv la-kol, u-mey-chin mazon l’chol b’ri-yotav asher bara.

Baruch ata Adonai ha-zan et ha-kol.


Uv’ney yero yeru-shala-yim ir ha-kodesh bim-heyra v’ya-meynu. Baruch ata Adodnai, boney v’rachamav yerushala-yim, amen.

Baruch ata Adon ai, Eloheynu melech ha-olam, ha-Eyl avinu malkeynu, adi-reynu par bor-eynu go-aleynu yotz-reynu k’dosheynu k’dosha lo’avok. Ro-eynu ro-ey yisrael, ha-melech ha-tov ha-mey-tiv la-kol, sheh-b’chol yom va’ymu hu hey-tiv, hu mey-tiv, ye-tiv lanu.

Ha-rachaman hu yanchi-leynu yom sheh-kulo shabbat u-m’nucha l’ha-ye y ha-olamim.

Migdol y’shuot malko v’oseh chessed lim-shicho, I’david ul-zaro ad olam.

Oseh shalom bim-romav hu ya-aseh shalom Aleynu v’al kol yisrael, v’imru amen.

Adonai oz l’amo yiteyn, Adonai y’vareych et amo va-shalom.

Praised are you Lord our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, who feeds the entire world in His goodness. And with favor, kindness and compassion, He gives food to all flesh for His kindness endures forever. In His great goodness, we never lack for anything. And we never lack for food because of His great name, for He is a G-d who feeds and sustains all life, and prepares food for all his creatures which He created, blessed are You, G-d who feeds all life.

As it is written, you shall eat and be satisfied and then you shall bless the Lord your G-d for the good land that He has given you. Blessed are You for the land and for the sustenance.

And rebuild Jerusalem, the holy city, speedily in our days. Blessed are You, G-d, who with compassion builds Jerusalem.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, who is our G-d, our Father, our King, our Strength, our Creator, our Redeemer, who fashions us, our Holy One, the Holy One of Jacob, the Shepherd who watches over Israel, the good Ruler who does good to all for day in and day out, He has done good, He does good, and He will do good.

May the Merciful One bequeath to us a day that is entirely Shabbat and is entirely tranquil for all time. May G-d who makes peace on high, make peace for all Israel and let us say, Amen.
As the century has drawn to a close, you have brought Shabbat and light into your home. Where were you when the century ended? That is a question your children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren will ask you. You can hand them this page and pass it down through time.

* Make a list of all those at home for Shabbat on this night and of their ages.

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Insert photograph of your family here