

SHABBOS: NOT ALL OR NOTHING!

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"And the Children of Israel shall guard the Sabbath, to make the Sabbath throughout their generations, an eternal covenant."

In the Talmud, Rebbe Yossi the son of Rebbe Yehudah says that when a man returns from the synagogue on Friday night, two angels come along with him -- one good, and one evil. If they reach the house and find that the candles are lit, the table is set, and the beds are made (meaning, the house is ready), then the good angel says "may it be His will that it be so for another Shabbos," and the bad angel is forced to answer "Amen."

If we look at the verse above, the Hebrew word for "for their generations" is written in its "contracted" form -- without those letters (in this case, the letter "vav") which indicate certain vowels. Thus, as an anonymous source pointed out, "l'dorosam" can also be read "l'dirosam" -- "for their homes." If the candles are lit, the table is set, and the house is prepared, then it is immediately recognizable that this is a Jewish home.

Often, people look at Shabbos as an "all or nothing" venture -- if I'm not willing to observe the Sabbath for 25 hours, then it's not worthwhile to observe it for 25 minutes, either. The Torah is hinting to us, however, that this is not true. There is tremendous value in lighting the candles, setting the table, and sitting down together as a Jewish family, regardless of what happens later.

Several years ago, a few outstanding Jewish philanthropists launched an excellent program called "Birthright Israel," offering teens heavily subsidized visits to Israel for several weeks. All the early data suggests that the program is successful -- at least over the short term -- and inspires greater attachment to the Jewish Nation. A simpler, yet more permanent, take on a Jewish birthright, is suggested by Rebbe Yossi: make a Shabbos dinner every Friday night. This is a "Jewish continuity" measure that has worked "for all generations," Not to mention, it's a lot less expensive -- and no security concerns will dissuade participants!

Just ask your spouse, your children, your parents, and/or your friends, to join you for two hours each Friday night. Light the candles. Set the table. And, of course, do your best in the kitchen. At this time of year, Shabbos still arrives in the early evening in the Northern Hemisphere -- candle-lighting is before 6:30 across the US. Who can't set aside six to eight p.m.? No TV, no phone calls, just you and the family, plus the guests who may have joined you.

Take **this** trip for six weeks, and you may never want to go back. You might even want to do a repeat

on Shabbos morning...!

Good Shabbos,
Rabbi Yaakov Menken

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