



**It gives us great pleasure to introduce reflections on Shabbat by Magen Avot. Thank you to everyone who contributed. We hope you enjoy reading it and have a lovely Shabbat.**

Fiona, David and Shifra



Magen Avot

## **Daniel Greenberg from Colombo**

Shabbat Shalom and I hope you are very much enjoying Shabbat UK 2019.

I am sending you these greetings from Colombo in Sri Lanka where I am training public officials in legislative drafting. Over the last few years I have on quite a few occasions found myself somewhere far-flung engaged in rule-of-law work, often in places more isolated than Sri Lanka. Normally there is no community at all, including Chabad, and Shabbos means 25 hours alone in my hotel room. This has made me think a lot about what Shabbos does and should mean for me.

For me, as for many others, my normal Shabbos experience centres around meals with my family and friends and praying with my community. And I miss both very much when I am away. But enforced isolation has reminded me that these are enhancements of my Shabbos experience and my spiritual life generally; but they cannot be the essence of either.

There are many people who regularly spend Shabbos without either family or community around them, for an enormously wide range of reasons: a religion that denied them a completely satisfying Shabbos experience would be inherently discriminatory, which I happen not to believe that God is.

So I think it's very important when we celebrate Shabbos that we separate out the cultural features that we have come to associate with it, from the religious essence of the day itself. One or two of the Shabbosos that I have spent alone in foreign countries have been among the most spiritually powerful Shabbosos of my life, precisely because they have been isolated. I remember a Shabbos in Malaysia where I was able to concentrate on the fact that the Yomim Noro'im were approaching, with an intensity that is often diluted by family and community social opportunities. I remember another Shabbos, which I think was also a Shabbat UK, when I sat on the balcony of my hotel room in the Solomon Islands looking at the depth of blue of the sea and discovered a new meaning for me in the midrashic explanation about the link between the blue colour of tcheiles for tzitsis and our perception of Heaven.

Not all my isolated Shabbosos have been so successful: sometimes, I have simply wanted to get home again and have been unable to focus on the spirituality of the day at all. But, of course, the same is true of all Shabbosos: sometimes being surrounded by family and community massively enhances the spirituality of Shabbos; but sometimes family or community events detract from it.

So my message to all my friends in the Magen Avot community today is that while enjoying the community cohesion of Shabbat UK, perhaps we can also take it as a useful opportunity to remember all those who, whether occasionally or regularly, do not find themselves surrounded on Shabbos by family, friends and community. Perhaps we can make an extra effort to include those people in family and community events to the extent that they want to be included; but perhaps we can also take inspiration from them, and remember that within our Shabbos experience we have to ensure that family, community and social interaction do not displace or dilute the essence of Shabbos itself, and that we remember to make time for developing our own personal relationships with God and for reflection on the peace and holiness of the Shabbos day itself.

Good Shabbos to everybody and looking forward to seeing you again soon.

Daniel Greenberg

## **Shelley Berke:**

I am sitting in a meeting at the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH).

The next item on the agenda is screen time. RCPCH are writing guidance for parents, teachers and others on the use of screens and social media by children.

This is an important piece of work because whatever we write is likely to be used as authoritative guidance. Everyone instinctively feels that too much screen time is bad (for all ages) but there is very little medical evidence out there for what constitutes too much.

We go round the table voicing opinions/experiences on the subject, to get a feel for what we might write.

“Imagine a whole day every week” I say “when all electronic devices are switched off-no mobile phones, no iPads, iPods, TV...”

My colleagues are surprised- “a whole day?” they ask “what would you do instead for all that time?”

I smile - “we talk to each other, play board games, go for walks. We have long sociable meals with family and friends. We sing, tell jokes, discuss issues which have come up during the week. We read, learn, relax, doze, and recharge our batteries for the week ahead”. “You actually do this already?” they ask.

“Yes” I reply “It’s called Shabbat”.

## **Reasons to love Shabbat by Devorah Taylor, age 7**

I love Shabbat because...

1. I can go to sleep whenever I want
2. I go to other people's houses
3. Guests come to my house
4. I don't have to go to school
5. I can play with my brothers and sister
6. If it's sunny I can play in the garden
7. If there is snow I can play in the snow
8. I can read
9. I can go to shul and get sweets
10. I can dress nicely
11. I can go to the children service
12. I can stay at home and wear pyjamas all day if I want to
13. I don't have to do my homework because I can't
14. I get nosh
15. I can do sports

# From Shabbat to Shabbat

*Occupied Belgium through the eyes of my father*



My father, (centre bottom row) aged 9 years old next to his mother and sister with two G.Is'.

Spa, Belgium September 1944

*My father lived in Belgium and was four years old when the war broke out. Known to be British, AND known to be Jewish, the family lived under forced residence in their house in Spa, a small village in the Ardennes, not far from the central fighting of the Battle of the Bulge. The family was liberated by the American Army in September 1944. I asked him if he had any recollections to share for Shabbat UK and this is a verbatim account of what he said:*

“10th May 1940, I was just about four years old when, Germany attacked Belgium and I remember clearly hearing planes overnight and thinking to myself, that horrible man Hitler is up there. They bombed the harbour.

Friday morning, my mother came in at 6 O' clock and she said “Romi, we have to leave”. She was wearing a blue velvet dressing gown. The family gathered in Antwerp where we lived and although it was Friday night, we all left taking as few belongings as possible; and we drove away, into the night, towards France where we thought we would be safer.

Some years later, this is now September 1944, we lived all these years under German occupation protected by our British passports so, unlike most of the Vecht family [who perished], we were in forced residence in a little place called Spa. The Germans were losing the war and for an entire week we had seen German army soldiers leaving - dishevelled, covered in dust, jumping on lorries and fleeing towards Germany. The Americans were nearing and I clearly remember on a Friday afternoon, seeing German fighters bombing in the distance, American tanks.

We were in our little bungalow on the main street going towards the German barracks when we saw a motorcycle and side car with two German soldiers wearing helmets ... very dusty uniforms, the side car had a machine gun, they stopped literally outside our little house, we thought - that was it. But it wasn't because they were starving and there was a tree in the field opposite the house, where they went and picked apples and then drove off.

That Saturday, the Germans announced that they would blow up the railway station down in the valley and we then fled our house and went to a neighbour, a little higher up the mountain. Sure enough we heard tremendous explosions and a piece of rail, at least half a metre long flew over the house into a greenhouse next to where we were sitting; demolishing the greenhouse; it could have killed us all."

Recorded January 14th 2019 for Magen Avot - Shabbat UK. Joshua Vecht.

## **Simcha Handley:**

Remembering my  
parents

When my parents died, I acquired a canteen of cutlery that they used to use when I was a boy. It had been sitting in its box untouched for any number of years before they passed on. It was manufactured in the UK, it is extremely well made, and the label of some long vanished cutler's shop in Portsmouth, where my father grew up, is still legible, as is a label tied to the key to the canteen, marked "Canteen" in my mother's handwriting.

We use the cutlery for meat dishes on Shabbat. I think of my parents each time I see it. It seems odd that something so mundane and ordinary can help to connect me with my parents, and I feel that the connection would not be there without the Shabbat.

## — **Fiona Taylor:**

Some of my most enduring Shabbat memories are from when I was a child staying in Leicester with my grandparents. My Grandma is one of 6, and most of her siblings settled in Leicester, so when we stayed there for Shabbat, I had the opportunity to see a lot of my extended family. I used to look over the balcony of the ladies gallery whilst sucking sweets, and see the heads of my Grandpa, Great Uncles, Father, Uncle and cousins all standing davening together. Leicester Hebrew congregation is a small and beautiful listed building and to me as a small child it was as if my family was the majority of the community there.

After shul, we would go home to my grandparents house and after lunch we would read, because we were not allowed to play cards on Shabbat!

## **The digital detox by Rafi Berke age 11**

Shabbat to me is a time to rest .I believe it takes away the huge amount of pressure on people who go to school and work, but having Shabbat I think is absolutely wonderful because: we get to catch up on sleep, spend time with our friend and family and {I think you will all agree with this} eat good food/also recent studies have shown that people that have one day a week not on screens are less likely to get: some types of cancer, anxiety and depression. So to conclude I think Shabbat is beneficial in many ways.

### **Simcha Handley:**

I recently came across this quote published in a magazine of political comment: "Modern life seems increasingly to entail a slow trudge through various forms of guilt towards the inevitability of death."

My response to the author, would be as follows: as a Jew, I am following a law-based religion. And because it is law-based, it has limits and boundaries. There are thirty nine forbidden tasks on Shabbat; not forty nor forty-one, and nobody is going to dream up any extra ones. Once you become aware of these tasks, you will know, either you have done one of them or you haven't. There is nothing to feel guilty about.

The most prominent belief system of the Western world depends on infinite devotion to a divine Person, and there is no limit on how far you should follow him. By us, there are just five mitzvot that have no fixed measure: the peah (corner of the field left for the poor), the firstfruits offering, pilgrimages to Jerusalem, acts of loving kindness and Torah study. The peah is of no interest to you unless you are a Jewish farmer in Israel; I asked two Rabbis in shul one morning to what extent it is in operation today, and they both didn't know. The firstfruits and the pilgrimages are defunct until the Temple is rebuilt. This just leaves us with acts of loving kindness and Torah study.

And when I do the washing up after Shabbat, selecting the meaty bowl and the washing up brush with the red bristles, I am putting

into operation the commandment of not mixing meat and milk,  
and the act of washing up becomes Divine service.

## shabbat uk

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R	C	A	N	D	L	E	S	K	E	N	N	B	N
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D	A	E	G	A	I	S	E	A	E	E	Y	V	P

CHALLAH  
GRAPE JUICE  
TORAH  
GUESTS  
CANDLES  
SHUL  
FRIDAY NIGHT  
SHABBAT UK  
SLEEPING  
WINE  
REST  
DAVEN

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