

Shabbat: The Gift of Yearning

Rabbi Ariel Burger

www.arielburger.com/info@arielburger.com

It has been widely reported that food tastes better on Shabbat, that naps are cozier, that time runs slower. There is no medication involved, no psychoactive substances. There are softly glowing candles, wine or grape juice, braided Challah bread, and food prepared with love and care.

And there is one other essential ingredient.

I recently learned a Shabbat song called “I will Yearn”. It was written by a late 18th century mystic, Rabbi Aharon of Karlin. It’s a gorgeous poem set to gorgeous music, about the beauty and healing power of Shabbat.

Because Shabbat is not just the absence of activity. It’s also a designated time to remove distractions and allow ourselves to feel our own hearts’ yearning, the longings, dreams, visions, and aspirations that we are often too busy to feel.

When I sing “I will Yearn” with its wistful tune, I feel that what I’m really saying is, “I am *willing* to yearn, even though yearning is uncomfortable.”

It’s uncomfortable because our culture often helps us avoid yearning. We are offered near-constant satiety, through always-available commodities, and the next show to binge watch, and persistent noise.

A counterpoint to that noise, Shabbat is called “a taste of the world to come”. It is a foreshadowing, an intimation of the world we dream of, a world of peace, plenty, dignity, calm, and healing – the world for which we yearn, or pray, or work.

Allowing ourselves to slow down enough to feel our heart’s yearning is a healing gift, one that can give us new strength and insight as we work to improve the world.

Shabbat gives us time, space, and intention to do just that. So, in addition to the candles, wine, and yummy bread, you might ask your loved ones to share a wish, a dream, or a longing. Our willingness to yearn is a step toward healing ourselves, and maybe even the world.