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## ABOUT OUR LEARNING MATERIALS

“And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.” *Genesis 2:3*

Shabbat. Each week we have the opportunity to gather together, to find comfort, to restore our souls. Shabbat is a reminder to create space in our lives for what is most important and sacred, to affirm our part in making the world more whole. Shabbat is a gift.

How do we create this holy gift each week? How might we deepen our understanding and practice of Shabbat? This year, journey with your Sh'ma group through learning materials which explore different aspects of Shabbat. You will discuss prayers, ancient and modern interpretations, reflections from Temple clergy and more.

As always, if you have any questions, please be in touch with Alexandra Horn ([ahorn@tedallas.org](mailto:ahorn@tedallas.org)) or Rabbi Kim Herzog Cohen ([kherzogcohen@tedallas.org](mailto:kherzogcohen@tedallas.org)).

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# Am I commanded to study Torah?

## L'asok b'Divrei Torah

*Baruch atah, Adonai  
Eloheinu, Melech haolam,  
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav  
v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי  
אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הַצּוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו  
וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסוּק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God,  
Sovereign of the universe,  
who hallows us with mitzvot,  
commanding us to engage with words of the Torah.

## COMMENTARY

### Adam Sol

Whether modern Jews believe that it is actually the word of God or some distillation of numerous ancient texts, Torah—the study of it, the interpretation of it, the struggle with it—is what committed Jews continue to base their faith upon. No moment in a Jew’s life—not a brit milah, not a sunset, not the descent into death itself—is without its accompanying text, which in turn has its ultimate basis in the original text itself, the Torah.

### Judith Shulevits, *The Sabbath World*, p.118

Whenever people begin reading the Book, they start keeping the Sabbath. And when they keep the Sabbath they read the Book. It is no accident that religions centered on the word of God and the texts in which it is written have set aside a day for absorbing them.

### Rabbi Amy Ross

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech HaOlam, asher kid’shanu b’mitzvotav v’tzivvanu la’asok b’divreiv Torah.*

Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, Ruler of the world, who has commanded us to busy ourselves with the study of Torah.

Jewish literature is rich with reminders of the importance of the study of Torah. For centuries, Jews have gathered in homes and *yeshivas* (houses of study), pouring over the ancient texts and trying to make sense of their meaning and messages. For centuries, Jews have lived by the principles of Torah, using its teachings to guide religious, personal, and business interactions. A simple read of the blessing shows that as Jews, we are commanded to “busy ourselves with the study of Torah.”

Most of us do not have the luxury of busying ourselves with the study of Torah as a career. Rather, we go to colleges or technical schools, or receive training for a specific set of skills that will enable us to have a meaningful, and hopefully lucrative, career. Even so, Judaism continues to place importance on the study of Torah. *Sanhedrin* teaches that, “Whoever teaches Torah to someone else’s child—it’s as if you have given birth to that child.” Certainly, such a statement shows that

our faith highly values the study of Torah, and that it is as important to the perpetuation of the Jewish people as having children.

In *Pirkei Avot*, Ben Bag Bag says about Torah, “Turn it and turn it again, for all is in it...” When I think about Torah in this way—that no matter how I look at it, I can find everything I need—I understand that I do not need to enroll in a *yeshiva* for Torah to be relevant to my life. Each book, each story, each passage has a lesson or a message that will speak to me differently at different moments in my life. And those words will speak to me whether I learn them within the walls of the synagogue, the walls of my home, or anywhere in between.

Fulfilling the commandment of the study of Torah means allowing yourself to dig deep into our tradition and then allowing that tradition to seep into our everyday lives. It means remaining connected to our values and teachings, feeling ownership over them, and passing them on to those we love. In this way, even through the busyness of our lives, we fulfill the commandment to busy ourselves with Torah.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. We may not set aside a day to absorb Jewish texts, as proposed by Judith Shulevits. However, each of us holds the potential to connect to Jewish learning. What Jewish learning is most interesting to you? What actions or practices are inspired by your learning?
2. You are currently engaging in Jewish learning as a Sh’ma group! Think back to a text or discussion that has stayed with you. What has resonated with you?