



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) or Rabbi Kim Herzog Cohen (kherzogcohen@tedallas.org).

How do I experience joy/happiness?

Ashrei

אֲשֵׁרֵי יוֹשְׁבֵי בֵּיתְךָ עוֹד יְהַלְלוּךָ סֵלָה.
אֲשֵׁרֵי הָעַם שְׂכַכָּה לּוֹ אֲשֵׁרֵי הָעַם שְׂיִהְיוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

*Ashrei yoshvei vietecha, od y'hal'lucha selah.
Ashrei haam shekachah lo, ashrei haam she-Adonai Elohav.*

Happy are those who dwell in Your house; they forever praise You!
Happy the people who have it so; happy the people whose God is Adonai.

COMMENTARY

Isaiah 58:13-14

“If you call the Sabbath a delight then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you **ride upon the heights of the earth.**”

Wayne Muller, Sabbath

“The more hurried and rushed we are, the more we are willing to trade happiness for desire—and, over time, the less we are able to discern the difference between the two. The marketplace presents to us with an awesome array of choices, all designed to satisfy our hunger, choices that grow exponentially and yet ever fast enough—products, services, entertainment, technology, all providing stimulus, diversion, and information. But little or any of it brings us true, lasting happiness.”

Rabbi Debra Robbins

Ashrei is an acrostic from the book of Psalms (Psalm 145) framed with Psalm 84:5 and 144:15 at the beginning and Psalm 115:18 at the end. I love how it encapsulates all the psalms, starting with the word *ashrei* (Psalm 1:1) concluding with *halleluyah* (Psalm 150:6) and in between giving me every possibility, a-z or *aleph* to *tav* (minus nun for some unexplained reason) to praise God for the goodness, satisfaction, deep seated happiness and joy that is possible (if not always present) in my life.

The word *ashrei* means to go straight and advance, to set something right, to declare happiness or call someone or something blessed. It’s not enough to translate it as “happy” because we might mistakenly identify it with a smiley face emoji. The happiness of *ashrei* is a combination of contentment and gratitude, a connection to something big and holy, a fleeting insight that whatever it is we do have (material things, intellectual ideas, spiritual practices, even memories) is enough, somehow makes us profoundly joyous and keeps us moving forward on the right path.

Before I pray it, I like to think about it this way—

***Ashrei.* How happy I am to sit in God’s house** (which could be anywhere).

***Ashrei.* How happy I am to be satisfied with what I have** (or don’t have).

***Ashrei.* How happy I am to sense of something sacred in my life** (at any moment, in every moment).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do you understand or experience Isaiah’s reference to “riding on the heights of the earth”?
2. What is the difference between desire and happiness?