

the troubles of the week, which tend to occupy me, but rather on the blessings that make my life worth living. I “reset” my mind, shedding worry and embracing peace. I pray not *for* blessings but to give thanks for those I already have. The only thing I ever ask in prayer is for the strength, courage, and wisdom to be the person I should be.

Ellen Morrow: On Friday mornings I place dough in my bread machine and set the timer so a challah will be baked and hot by dinnertime. We have a nice dinner complete with blessings over candles and grape juice (rather than wine). I’ve tried to introduce the longer version of *kid-dush* and the *birkat hamazon* (blessing after the meal), as well as “extras” like talking about what each of us is grateful for this week, but the rest of the family isn’t interested or finds it too uncomfortable, so I bow to the majority.

I make a real effort not to do work-related activities or think about work on Shabbat, or to do unpleasant, mundane chores such as laundry, grocery shopping, and cleaning. I would love to incorporate a modified version of *cholent* (just put up a meal in my crock-pot so it’s available as desired) so there’s minimal cooking on Shabbat, but I haven’t yet figured out how to work that into my week. Similarly, I would love to have the house clean and sparkling, but again, how do I make the time?

Barbara K. Shuman: Frankly, it has been difficult for us to enjoy Shabbat as fully as we would like because we don’t celebrate it in community, perhaps because it’s not part of the culture of our congregation. My husband and I have rarely—twice in 8 years!—been invited to someone’s home for a Shabbat meal, and I confess we have only rarely invited others to share a Shabbat meal in our home. On Saturdays we do participate in the alternative Shabbat morning informal *minyan* that meets in the basement of our temple; unfortunately the regular sanctuary service is devoted to the bar mitzvah and his family, causing uninvited guests to feel somewhat unwelcome. We try to refrain from work and take long walks on Shabbat afternoon if the weather permits.

Several years ago we had as house-guests a family that was far more Shabbat observant than we were. Dur-



Theo Hansen, 3, takes in the magic of Chanukah at home. He learns about the holidays at the “Holiday Happenings” program of Temple Beth Or, Washington Township, New Jersey.

ing the month they lived with us we adopted their customs. Every Friday my friend and I would shop and prepare a Shabbat evening meal, as well as food for Saturday lunch. Our two families then all sat down together to Shabbat dinner, after which we recited a full *birkat hamazon* and sang *zmirot* (songs). On Shabbat morning we all walked to their Conservative congregation for services; sat down to a lovely leisurely lunch; and spent the afternoon talking, reading, going to the nearby park, or visiting friends. No TV or phone interrupted the peacefulness of the day, which ended with *havdalah*. This is close to the vision I have of a better Shabbat, perhaps with the addition of a small study group in someone’s home later in the afternoon. I don’t know why, but we have never tried to recreate these Shabbat customs on our own. Just having the support of one other family made it seem so easy.

Steve Arnold: My ideal Shabbat would be a day of complete rest, filled with a chance to read, think, and enjoy the company of close friends. I’ve experienced bits of each, but haven’t yet been able to bring all three together.

Judy Fisher: I continually look for ways to enhance my ability to experi-

ence Shabbat as a day of rest, a day of separation from the rest of the week, a day of peace. On Shabbat morning I go to the chapel, sit next to friends, gaze through the stained-glass windows, hear the voices of song and prayer all around me, and feel at peace. Afterwards I go home and read or take a walk, talk to my husband, play with my daughter, visit friends or have friends visit us. When we perform our

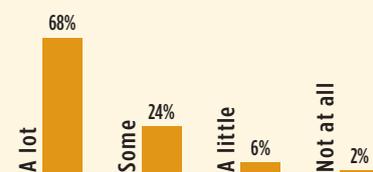
havdalah service, usually about once a month, I really feel like we have completed Shabbat. I have tried my best, while raising three kids, to stop doing household chores, and especially laun-

A BIGGER PICTURE

How much does being Jewish involve celebrating the Jewish holidays?



How much does being Jewish involve marking lifecycle events Jewishly?



How much does being Jewish involve celebrating Shabbat regularly?



—THE RESEARCH NETWORK, 2007