



December 2009-January 2010 www.iffp.net P.O. Box 5413, Takoma Park, MD 20913 (301) 270-6337

REVEREND JULIA'S REFLECTION – A HOLIDAY GIFT OF SABBATH

Several weeks ago I represented IFFP at the Fannie Mae Homeless Walk. I asked the crowd what do Jews and Christians have in common, hoping that someone would say something along the lines of 'caring for others'. Instead, a young female voice cried out, "Sabbath". It wasn't what I was hoping for, but this young voice was right on. Sabbath is one of the main things we have in common. But do we really take the Sabbath seriously?

As I was thinking about this upcoming holy day season and all the demands the season puts on us (or we allow to be put on us), it dawned on me that a gift we all could use during this season and anytime really is the practice of Sabbath. Keeping the Sabbath holy is one of the Ten Commandments, right along with "do not kill" and "do not steal". All of us hold fast to not having the intention of killing or stealing. Yet most of us probably don't hold that same clear intention of keeping the Sabbath holy. So now I'd like to propose this clear intention, a hope, that all of our community within IFFP can have some time for rest....deep rest.



I was strongly reminded recently of the peace that the Sabbath can bring, when we take it seriously, when I read an article by self-proclaimed Jew/Bu (Buddhist), Marc Lesser. It comes from Huffingtonpost.com and I hope his words will help you face the, sometimes, daunting task of doing all the holidays, not with a "have to" but with a "want to" approach.

[Doing Less Means More Productivity, Kindness & Love](#) by Marc Lesser

When my two children were in elementary school, a weekly day of doing less was an important part of our family ritual. We borrowed some ideas from the Jewish Sabbath as well as Buddhist Day of Mindfulness practices. At the heart of our day we had three simple rules that we applied from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday evening:

- *Rule #1: There was no spending money*
- *Rule #2: There was no watching television*
- *Rule #3: We did something together as a family*

These three guidelines produced significant results in the quality of those twenty-four hours. What a relief to not buy anything, not have the television on, and spend time simply enjoying each other's presence. My wife and I talked more with our two children; we read books, told stories, played games, went for walks, and shared meals. The biggest benefit of this structured break was that, for a day, the pace of our lives slowed down and our family connections increased.

One of my favorite parts of this ritual was the formal ending. We observed the Jewish tradition of looking for the first three stars to become visible on Saturday evening, signaling that Sabbath was over. It was fun and exciting for the four of us to stand on our deck together, seeing who could find the three stars as the sun faded and nighttime slowly emerged. Of course, since we live in Marin County, dense fog sometimes forced us to use our imaginations.

Instituting rest and simplicity is not a magic wand for perfection. There were occasional

disagreements, grumpiness, and boredom. But our imperfections often emerge as the most endearing parts of ourselves, and those "Sabbath" days stand out as important building blocks, and are great memories, for our still-growing family.

I'm a big proponent of doing less, and at times even of doing nothing. Nearly every morning for the past 35 years I've spent about 30 minutes, doing nothing; nothing but being aware of my breath and body, and occasionally just appreciating being here, being alive. I also like to spend whole days, about once a month, in the practice of doing nothing, and once a year spend six or seven days, again, nothing. I often suggest to my coaching clients, busy executives and non-profit leaders, to take the time, right in the midst of their busy, hectic workdays to do nothing - nothing but being aware of the breath; just noticing, I'm alive; I'm here. It seems to result in more calm, more productivity, and more effectiveness during the rest of the day.

The art of doing less isn't merely about becoming more productive employees or business people. The true benefit of focusing on and taking a break from busyness is that it brings more kindness and love into our lives. With less busyness and unnecessary effort, more kindness and love can rise to the surface, leading to more effectiveness, energy, and focus. When we feel depleted, love is the best replenisher -- which includes the love we feel for ourselves, the love we freely give to others, and the love that comes to us from the people we care for and admire most.

It's worth pointing out that the opposite seems to be true as well. In our increasingly busy and impatient world, people seem to be less kind and patient with each other. Much of that seems to stem from busyness itself and from the increasing attitude that being polite and caring is just another form of wasting time.

When we do less and begin to unravel many of the motivations, worries, and strivings that make us run in circles -- and when we stop trying to second-guess everyone else's motivations, worries, and strivings -- what we find at the very core of self and of life, I believe, is kindness and love. Those two glorious things are the most profound levers for accomplishing more.

This is not a radical idea. And yet, what a radical idea! What a radical way to live your life! It underpins the best of psychological, spiritual, and contemplative practice. It is the fundamental teaching of all great mystics and is the experience most of us hold deepest in our hearts. We glimpse this basic truth whenever we touch birth or touch death and experience a complete acceptance of the simplicity and sacredness of being human. The more you quiet your mind and let go of striving -- which is all too often someone else's concept of striving imposed on you -- the less you have to "do" and, somehow miraculously, the more that love springs forth from you. I believe that this simple formula is central to being a functioning, happy, and truly contributing human being.

Still, doing less takes courage. Stopping, pausing, reflecting, and fully doing one thing can be much more difficult than reflexively reacting and distracting yourself from what is most essential, most heartfelt, and most needed in your life

Happy Sabbath-Keeping during the holy days!
Gratefully yours,
Rev. Julia

FROM THE BOARD

JEN LIEBREICH

The board spent many hours this fall addressing the topic of "[alumni membership](#)" and has crafted a new opportunity for families whose children have all graduated from our Coming of Age (COA) program. These alumni families will be eligible for reduced membership dues, which will be offered at \$400 annually, which we hope recognizes and honors their dedication to IFFP over the course of their child(ren)'s Sunday School 'career'. Retaining families after COA is an issue the board struggles with every year, especially as these are members who add so much to the community in terms of historical memory and knowledge, continuing volunteer hours by teaching or committee work, and, most importantly, long-term friendships. The holiday season is a time of giving and receiving, and retaining long-term IFFP members allows our community to do both. The board is currently discussing the idea of a lifetime membership fee, so if you have thoughts on this or any other issue, please email me.



Happy Hanukkah, Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year!

FROM THE RABBI – HANUKKAH AND CHRISTMAS IN HISTORY



The underlying message of Hanukkah has been somewhat distorted over time through an emphasis on military victory and the miracle of the oil. Judah Maccabee is often portrayed falsely as an epic hero who wins a decisive battle against the forces of Antiochus Epiphanes. Perhaps, in a more historically accurate version, the Maccabees engaged in guerrilla warfare and Judah Maccabee was killed in the battle of Modin; Antiochus ended his military campaign once he secured enough gold from the desecrated Temple to pay the Romans their mandatory tribute. The true victory, however, is a moral victory...one in which the minority culture of the Hebrews is preserved and the process of assimilation of the Jews is aborted.

To help our understanding of the history involved, I've got with a basic definition. Wikipedia defines Pharisees as follows: *The word Pharisees ([lat. pharisæ|us, -i](#)) comes from the [Hebrew](#) מִישׁוּרִים *perushim* from שׁוּרֵף *parush*, meaning "set apart"... The Pharisees were, depending on the time, a political party, a social movement, and a school of thought among Jews that flourished during the [Second Temple Era](#) (536 BCE–70 CE). After the destruction of the Second Temple, the Pharisaic sect was re-established as [Rabbinic Judaism](#) — which ultimately produced normative, traditional Judaism, the basis for all contemporary forms of Judaism...*"

This definition helps us understand the basic context of the Jewish world among the Pharisees and a bit about the reason for the celebration of Hanukkah. At its root, Hanukkah honors the ultimate chutzpah of the newly formed pharisaic social and economic party. Rather than become absorbed into the majority culture, the Maccabee's absorb the majority into the distinctive minority practices of Judaism. The Jewish world in the aftermath of the victory sees huge social and intellectual changes: the philosopher king is transformed into the personage of the Messiah; the Pythagorean concept of resurrection becomes an integral part of Messianic theology, and the Socratic emphasis upon the dominance of teacher over parent blooms into the practice of discipleship.

The Pharisees adopt the Hellenistic idea of acting without a precedent; they are the first Jews to fight on the Sabbath on order to protect human lives. Based upon this unprecedented behavior, the Pharisees institute a new practice: "when it comes to saving a humans life, all religious law is abrogated." Within this historical context, Jesus is sometimes identified as a "dissident Pharisee", and sometimes known as the "charismatic hassidim". The early Pharisee community practiced the art of spiritual healing. Can we find a place for our understanding of Jesus as a healer, leader, and a Jew somewhere in this story? Perhaps this is an historical touch point between Jesus and the Jews, as well as between Christmas and Hanukkah.

IFFP CALENDAR **SUSAN RYDER**

DECEMBER

December 6: Gathering - Advent

Lessons & Carols
 Adult Group: "Don't Light the Menorah
 Candles too Close to the Christmas Tree"
 Sunday School, Session 8
 Yoga
 COA - Einstein
 COA Prep - Field Trip

December 13: Gathering - Hanukkah

Adult Group: IFFP Teen Panel
 Sunday School, Session 9
 Yoga
 COA - Einstein
 COA Prep – Einstein

December 20: Gathering - Christmas

Holiday Party & Potluck Brunch
 Nativity play, presented by the 5th grade
No Sunday school

December 27: No Gathering

JANUARY

January 3: No Gathering

January 10: Gathering - Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Adult Group: History of Jews & African Americans
 Sunday School Session 10
 COA - Einstein
 COA Prep - PM

January 17: No Gathering

January 24: Gathering - Christian Mysticism

Adult Group: Christian Mysticism
 Sunday School Session 11
 COA - Einstein
 COA Prep - Einstein

January 31: Gathering - Tu Bish'vat

Adult Group
 Sunday School Session 12
 COA - Einstein
 COA Prep - Einstein

ADULT GROUP THEMES **LARRY BOSTIAN**

December 6: "Don't Light the Hanukkah Candles too Close to the Christmas Tree": The Joys & Challenges of Celebrating Hanukkah & Christmas in the same family. Led by Ian Spatz, this is always an interesting, stimulating, and sometimes provocative topic for interfaith families. Please join us with your questions, comments, struggles and suggestions.

December 13: IFFP Teen Panel: This will be an opportunity to hear from and ask questions of some of our wonderful post-COA teens about their experiences as interfaith children at IFFP and in the world.

January 10: Karen Somerville, who gifted us last year with her words and her song, will address the historical relationship between African Americans and Jews in this country. She is the founder of the African American Heritage Council as well as the Schoolhouse Museum in W Pt., dedicated to the preservation of photographs, oral histories, and the documentation of the contribution of blacks in early Kent County, MD.

January 24: Christian Mysticism

RECIPES NEEDED FOR IFFP COOKBOOK FUNDRAISER

JEN BYRNE

Yes---we're cooking up an interfaith cookbook! Please send us your recipes for the first ever IFFP Cookbook! We want to include your favorite dishes, along with your favorite interfaith tidbits, sayings, and prayers. Ideas and thoughts are welcome, as we are still collecting information. We are compiling recipes from members of the community that reflect our Jewish and Christian traditions. The book will likely be organized around our religious holidays, so matzo ball soup or Christmas cookies are perfect. We also welcome any recipe that reflects your religious culinary traditions even its non-holiday specific. Once the books are produced, we will sell them to raise money for IFFP programs. Please email your recipes to Jill Bernstein or Jen Byrne.

FUNDRAISING & COMMEMORATIVE DONATIONS

DAVID QUIGLEY

Once again, IFFP is an eligible charity in the Federal Government's Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). The CFC is a program in which the Federal Government encourages its employees to donate money to one or more pre-approved charities. For those who are Federal employees, please remember IFFP as you make your CFC contribution decisions this year. Also, please let all your friends and family members who are Federal employees know about IFFP's participation in this program. This is a great opportunity for IFFP fundraising, so let's get the word out! **IFFP's CFC number is 27138.**

A donation was made by Jessica and Greg Vistnes in honor of Pete Flynn, for lending his *awesome* musical talent to their son Eric's COA ceremony.

HOLIDAY TRADITIONS & OPRAH

MOLLY NATCHIPOLSKY

Oprah Winfrey and Oprah.com have asked readers to share stories about their holiday traditions. It got me to thinking that all of us at IFFP have a unique perspective in how we celebrate two faith traditions during the Holiday Season (and throughout the year). Stories like any of ours might be something fresh for this venue. If you are interested in sharing how you celebrate the holidays, please go to www.oprah.com, click on the 'Spirit' tab then go to 'Tell Oprah Your Story' on the right side of the page and click on the link to 'Tell Us About Your Holiday Traditions'. Please mention IFFP in your story and please send a copy to Susan Ryder for our own collection; we've been trying for several years to compile these.

UPCOMING EVENTS

CHRISTMAS GATHERING & HOLIDAY POTLUCK – DECEMBER 20TH

This year we will repeat our successful combination Christmas Gathering/ Holiday Party (Hanukkah & Christmas) on December 20th at Einstein! The IFFP choir will lead the festivities December 20th with wonderful holiday music and lots of holiday sing-along songs! Following the Gathering, we will have a fabulous Holiday Potluck Brunch Party. We'll also have a chance to do some holiday community service by helping to put together the toiletries baskets for Springvale Terrace residents. (See the full article above.) Then we can extend our party to Springvale!

Any families interested in going from Einstein to Springvale in Silver Spring to distribute the baskets and sing carols and holiday songs, please contact Diane Katz or Philip Bregstone about the Takoma Carolers who will be caroling at Springvale that afternoon.

Potluck Food Assignments: Please bring a brunch item to share for 15 people (e.g. egg/tuna/chicken salad, quiches, noodle kugel, fruit salad, pasta salad, etc.) Board members, please bring a dessert item. IFFP will provide drinks.

If you would like to help with the party, please contact Susan Ryder or Jessica Vistnes.

CAROLING

About 12 of us got together and went caroling last year at holiday time; we had a 4-part *capella* group and made it to Springvale Terrace retirement community and the VA Hospital at Irving, NW, along with singing some in the streets & stores of old-town---including our last breaths at DC Takoma Co-Housing. It was lots of fun!

We are going to do it again this year and you are invited! We will go caroling on Sunday, December 20th in the mid-afternoon for a couple of hours (warm-ups at 1:30, with singing from 2 to 4:30).

There will be three 75-min rehearsals - Sunday 12/6 at 7:15pm, Sunday 12/13 at 5:30pm, and Sunday 12/19 at 5:30pm. Rehearsals are held at the Bregstones' house. Anyone from middle school up is welcome to join us. **Please RSVP to Philip Bregstone.**

(NOTE: This is a different group from the one that sings for Gatherings with Marcie.)

HOLIDAY GIFT COLLECTIONS

SPRINGVALE TERRACE ASSISTED LIVING HOLIDAY COLLECTION

IFFP's annual holiday collection of personal care/toiletry items for the residents of Springvale Terrace (assisted living in Silver Spring) began in November and will continue through December 20th.

Here are some small gift ideas: emery boards, shaving cream, hand lotion, small tissue packs, moisturizer, socks, pantyhose, lipstick, bars of soap, etc. Dollar stores have other great ideas and hotel samples work well. Think stocking stuffers! Keep in mind, Springvale has about 120 residents, of which only about twenty are men.

We will have a table set up at the Holiday Party December 20th for packaging these gifts and hope all of our IFFP children will help us with this! We will deliver the gifts after the IFFP Holiday party. For further information, please contact Diane Katz.



MOMS GROUP WISH LISTS

The Holiday gift collection for the MOMS group is underway at IFFP. The MOMS group is a private mentoring group for teenage mothers and their children in Montgomery County. The members meet as a group once a month, plus individual meetings with mentors. That's where IFFP comes in, especially during the holidays. We have provided Thanksgiving food to the November meeting and holiday gifts from IFFP are at the heart of the December meeting. Each individual has put forth a "wish list" of 2-3 items for the holidays; the wishes range from clothes to toys to pots and pans. The needs speak to the dire financial situation of these moms and children, so let the spirit of giving guide you. You can show your children how to help other kids and take the opportunity to talk about the traditions of Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, and Christmas.

This past Sunday, our members picked almost all of the 75 names of mothers and their children, which means that lots of wishes will come true in December. That is a record for most names picked on one day! **There are a few more names if there anyone would still like to contribute.** Please email Promise Ahlstrom.

Logistics for MOMS Group Wish Lists:

- The next step for IFFP members, after choosing the names, is to shop for the gifts, wrap them, and perhaps most importantly, identify each present with the appropriate name and number. The number ensures that the right gift finds the right child!
- I try to call givers on the Saturdays preceding the Gatherings to remind them.
- I will be at both Gatherings December 6th and 13th to collect the presents.
- I will be taking the gifts out to the meeting place early on Monday December 14th.
- IFFP members can also drop off their labeled presents at Promise's house. any time before Monday December 14th and I will deliver them.
- Please feel free to call Promise if you have questions.

I have heard from the coordinator at the MOMS group that the mothers are also very appreciative of Target gift cards in lieu of presents.

I think the project is a beautiful one, where we can engage our hearts as well as our children in giving instead of receiving, as well as thinking about the needs of others. Thanks to everyone at IFFP.

SPRING WOMEN'S RETREAT

KAREN JACKLER

SAVE THE DATE – APRIL 16-18, 2010

One of the greatest parts of being a woman in IFFP is our fabulous annual Spring Women's Retreat. For one weekend a year we leave our families and responsibilities at home and go the mountains or the beach. This year the retreat will be in Bethany Beach, DE, at the Christian Conference Center that's part of the United Church of Christ. We held a retreat there a few years ago. It's a block from the boardwalk and beach, very rustic and homey; the facility has a large kitchen and living room as well as a conference room for large events-like yoga or dancing.

Last year was my first IFFP retreat, and it was a great experience. The facilitator had the right blend of humor and philosophy; the meals together were delicious and fun; and there was an unexpected snow that blanketed the mountain. All in all, it was a relaxing overnight trip away from the kids and a chance to get to know some of the IFFP women without the usual distractions.

GET INVOLVED WITH THE WOMEN'S RETREAT

I enjoyed the retreat so much that I volunteered to organize it this year! Carol Muskin is also helping organize, and we both could use some volunteers to help organize the retreat. Now that we have a place, we need to identify a theme and find a facilitator. It would be great to get a group of IFFP women around the table to hear some fresh ideas about themes! So come to the Gatherings, find us and let us know what you'd like to do/see/experience as part of the retreat. Also, we need some detail-oriented women that can help with arranging carpools and meals. So save the date and start planning now to attend this wonderful weekend. Also, please let Carol or I know if you would like to attend.

Contact Karen Jackler or Carol Muskin for more information or to help with planning.

YOGA WITH JANICE SIMSOHN SHAW

SUSAN RYDER

Melinda Frederick says..."The IFFP Yoga class is the highlight of my work week, providing a welcome space to build strength, flexibility, and balance in a stress free community of fellow IFFP members." Our wonderful yoga class has been taught by our very popular teacher, Janice Simsohn Shaw, since the fall of 2007. This class will continue for 8 sessions from January to June. (She will consult with the class regarding specific dates for the classes). Janice tends to teach in a flowing style that draws upon a variety of yoga forms, including Astanga and Kripalu. She has taught absolute beginners, as well as experienced yoga practitioners, all of whom are

welcome in this class. She loves "...yoga both for its ability to stretch and strengthen the body, as well as to calm the mind." Janice teaches to all levels of students in a style that has kept folks returning year after year.

The class meets from 11:00am -12:00pm in the dance studio at Einstein High School. The cost for 8 sessions is \$120; 4 sessions, \$60.00. We need a core group to sign up in advance in order to enable us to rent the dance studio at Einstein and continue to offer this special opportunity to the IFFP community, so please register ASAP by contacting Susan Ryder.

Sunday School & Teens

NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

I have been hearing very positive feedback from parents about their children's classes this year. A COA student said that she was having a lot of fun in the class. The fifth graders are too. They had a great time building *and then destroying* a gingerbread temple (lesson by Diane Ives). The 3 year olds love their relaxed, playful class. I could go on and on telling you positive things happening in every one of our classes. Thank you, teachers, for your time and love!

Parents: If you have any concerns, suggestions or praise, please let me and your child's teachers know. We really want your feedback and we listen to it! The summer online surveys are helping us work on your ideas and plan for future Sunday School classes.

Here are a few items I want to bring to your attention:

- This year, each class is planning their own community service projects. Some will go to Springvale Terrace and some will not. See your child's teacher for details.
- We have been taking class pictures for the last few weeks. The only class picture remaining is COA, and we will take that one on December 6th. When all the pictures have been taken, your teachers will e-mail them to you.
- The Holiday Party is coming up on December 20th and the 5th grade class will once again perform the Nativity scenes. They will be practicing for it on December 13th.



Thanks for your support for me and for your teachers!

TEEN GROUP

BENJAMIN FOOTE, TEEN LEADER

IFFP's Teen Group continues to be an enormous success, with many great people and great times. Over the course of the fall, our elite team – now featuring eleven regulars – has held a variety of events, focused, at different times, on our three goals of fun, service, and spiritual growth.

Looking forward, we plan to up the bar on all three of those goals. Starting off the year, we will take inspiration from the season of Epiphany to engage more directly important theological and life questions. We'll get a little help from Kevin Smith's movie *Dogma*, with discussion and, of course, food! February (the 19th and 20th) will bring our overnight winter retreat to the Am Kolel Sanctuary in western Montgomery County, including a shabbat/havdalah ceremony, a night hike, and other great activities led by Matt Tonti. We also hope to ramp up our service activities as

well, with a coffeehouse fundraiser for Darfur, as well as a deeper look into homelessness – something to create a more personal connection and awareness beyond just dropping off food or money at an anonymous doorstep. Of course, we will strive for new heights of experience, connection, and fun.

ODDS AND ENDS

SUSAN RYDER

THE LATEST INFORMATION

Our website, www.iffp.net, has a listing of events and dates on the home page as well as a more detailed calendar of events that members can access at any time: (http://www.iffp.net/events/user_calendar.php). IFFP also has a Facebook page. Also, please be sure to look weekly at Sue Katz Miller's wonderful blog on interfaith life, OnBeingBoth.com.

INCLEMENT WEATHER

IFFP follows Montgomery County Public Schools for closure due to weather. In case of icy conditions, snow, or storms call the County at 301-279-3673, or <http://www.mcps.k12.md.us>.