An old story: A Jewish man, named Yossi is stranded on a deserted island for nearly 20 years. One day a cruise ship is seen off the cost. Yossi lights a bonfire, signals are exchanged and he is to be rescued. The captain of the cruise ship sails the rescue boat to the island to bring back the castaway. When his boat reaches shore, the captain asks Yossi for a tour of the island, he wants to see how Yossi managed to live here alone all this time. Yossi takes the captain on a tour of all the buildings he built in the time he was stranded on the island. He is so proud of what he has built, he says to the Captain, "I built up the island just like my hometown, so I would not be homesick all these years." He points out his summer house, his winter home, a bowling alley, a synagogue, a library, a school, another synagogue. At this the captain stops, and asks, "Yossi you are here alone correct?" "Yes" Yossi replies. "Then why have you built two synagogues?" The captain asks. Yossi smiles and proclaims, "This one I pray in all the time, that other one, oy, that's the one I would never step foot in!"

Friends let me ask you a question in this New Year; which of Yossi's two synagogues do you attend, which of them are you sitting in right now? I don't mean for you to compare how often you frequent the West Campus vs. Tarzana. Nor even how often you drop your children off for religious school at either of our two campuses. Which synagogue are you praying in right now, the one you pray in all the time, or the one you never do?

I don't ask this question to embarrass anyone, and I am certainly not trying to offend. The truth is I already know the answer, I'm here most Friday nights, I recognize faces, I know how many cookies we order for the oneg and without singling anyone out, I know that on any given Friday, 95% of our congregation isn't here. I don't know where

you go, I have my suspicions, but that is not really the point. What is the point, what I am concerned about is why you don't come. And to this I think I know the answer as well, you tell it to me all the time, even when you don't think you are. The reason you don't come to temple, is not because you don't like it, though for some that may also be true. The reason you don't come to temple is because you're to busy, you don't have time for temple.

Friday is the worst day of the week for many you to try and make it to a 7:30 or 8:00 service. Traffic is horrible, you often have to work late, your kids have sports, your house keeper is off on the weekends, your exhausted from a grueling week of school, of work, of schlepping and errands. The last thing you are able to do, forget about want to do for a moment, is get dressed up and come to shule. Dinner and a movie at the Commons, maybe, but Temple, NO WAY! No time, and no energy.

But it is not just because of our schedules that the pews are pretty empty of congregants on a Friday night. The reality is that we make time for things that are important to us, even in our busy schedules, 7:30am soccer games on Saturday mornings are never missed, theater and sporting events tickets rarely go un-used. We buy VCRs, $400 TIVO systems and Satellite Dishes so that we won't miss The West Wing or Sopranos.

Shabbat, even at the most basic level of lighting candles and having a Shabbat dinner, forget for a moment about attending services, or studying Jewish texts is not observed in most of our homes, because Shabbat does not fit into the context of the modern American lifestyle. Taking a day, every week to reflect and connect with our selves and those we love. To pay homage to sacred traditions and teaching of a 5,000

year old tradition is not part of the rhythm of American life, though on an intellectual level we might agree that it may bring harmony to our lives, Shabbat, even as I just described is not in-harmony with our lives as we live them every day.

According to Dr. Alvin Reinis, a Reform Jewish Philospher, and one of the first scholars to make this observation, Shabbat has lost its significance for many modernist Jews because it is, at least in its tradition definition so out of touch with our lives and lifestyles. On an intellectual level, many find it simply hard to believe that God actually commands us to do anything. We throw that word, command or mitzvah around pretty freely in Reform Judaism, but the reality is if we really felt commanded by God, we would be leading very different and much more orthodox lives.

Maimonides the great Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages, explained that there are two types of commandments or mitzvoth. Those that society would develop anyway in order to function, such as thou shalt not murder, steal, commit adultery, bear false witness, etc are of the category of *Mitzvot Selchliot*, or Common Sense commandments. And those that are just commanded upon the Jewish people by God, such as keeping kosher, fasting on Yom Kippur, eating Matzah during Passover, etc, these are called *Mitzvot Shimiot*, and they are followed simply because God requires it of us.

Long ago Reform Judaism abandoned almost all of those commandments that fall into the second category. And we must be honest with ourselves and our tradition, those that we do follow today, are followed not out of a sense of commandedness but rather some historical obligation to maintain them in honor of those who came before us. My

father kept kosher, fasted on Yom Kippur, therefore I shall do the same, is a common rational, I hear it all the time.

Of the first category, common sense commandments, most Reform Jews observe these, not because God commanded them, but because they make sense to us, its just reassuring that our tradition also espouses them. The Mitzvah of Shabbat, sits between these two classifications. In its broadest sense, a day of rest and reflection makes good rational sense to all of us, we all need a day off from time to time. But in its more specific application, namely the traditional observance of Shabbat, it makes no sense at all, and why should God care if we drive, use electricity, handle money, or travel on Shabbat, all things prohibited by traditional Jewish law, but contrary to how we live our lives in a modern age.

The list goes on, modern American Jews do not observe a Friday-Saturday Shabbat for other reasons as well. It makes no economic sense, if non-Jewish businesses are open on Saturdays, then Jewish business must be as well in order to compete in the marketplace. We live in a predominantly Christian society, as was evident by the flood of memorial services held on Sunday, it is not part of the larger culture of America to be religious on Saturday, Saturday is for sports, Sunday is for God. And this supports the political reality of our nation as well, Sunday observance, and Christian holidays are part of the legal calendar of our nation, the Jewish calendar is not in sync with the political reality of American life.

For all these reasons, and simply because we work so hard, Shabbat lacks meaning and relevance in our lives, if it was relevant maybe we would make time for it, as we do other things, but its relevancy escapes us.

This, by the way is not a new problem, 150 years ago, the Reform Movement made many of these same observations, their response was to do away with Friday night services all together, and they held them instead on Sundays, when the rest of the non-Jewish community was also in their houses of worship. But people didn't come then either, Sunday was already busy with other things.

To be a Reform Jew you don't need to come to Temple on Friday nights, but we all NEED what we are offering here on those evenings.

In fact we all need it more than ever for the very reasons that we are so exhausted, stressed, busy, worn-out, overbooked and overloaded. Our lives are crazy, we live in a 24/7/365 world, with high speed, always on, always open, drive up window access to everything but our own souls. If ever a generation and a society needed Shabbat and what it has to offer us in terms of a quality of life, a view of the world from the inside out, then it is this generation, this society, we need Shabbat. It is an island of holiness and sanctity in a vast sea of a rapidly flowing world. It is a safe harbor, it is the rescue ship that comes and picks you up and sails you away every week. Our only challenge is making it relevant to our lives. I trust that we can find the time for it, no matter how hard we work we seem to find time for those things that are important to use, we found time to be here today.

Shabbat is the answer to our prayers, well at least to those who have time to pray, it is for all of us a solution to this problem. But not Shabbat as has been defined for us throughout the generations, we must envision a new Shabbat, Shabbat version 2.0

enhanced and upgraded, for the realities of modernity, made relevant for who we are and reflective of what we truly need and believe.

To do this we need to accept a more accurate definition of what Shabbat really is. Shabbat is not about coming to temple, that is part of it but not the most important thing. Shabbat is also not about denying oneself the pleasures of life. It is not about the can't do's, can't turn on lights, can't go out with friends, can't drive. First we are Reform Jews and we don't subscribe to most of those traditions for many good ideological reasons anyway, and second the gift of Shabbat in our lives is not a day when we can't do things we might enjoy, it's a period of time when we are required to only do things that we will enjoy. It is *zman kodesh*, it is sacred time.

And here is the strength of Reform Judaism, here is what it really means to be a Reform Jew. We are not bound by the letter of Jewish law, in the words of Philosopher Eugene Borowitz, tradition has a vote, but not a veto for Reform Jews. Our movement was founded upon the principle of finding a nexus between our lives and Jewish tradition, creatively meeting the challenge of living Jewishly in a modern world. We are not an all or nothing movement, we are about compromise; we are about adaptation to modernity. Compromise, not of our values, but when necessary our customs, so that we might express our values in our daily lives.

When I was a Freshman in college, I began to wear a kippah everyday. I would wear it all the time, it was a powerful symbol to me, and those who saw me wear it. It served as a constant reminder of my responsibility to God, and my commitment to living a Jewish life. I made a promise to myself at that time. I would take the kippah off my head if I was ever engaged in an activity that was not in accordance with the tradition it

represented. So if I ate in a non-kosher restraint, even if I was eating kosher style, I would take the yamukah off. If I happened to be out on a Saturday, at the movies or a ball game, I would not wear the kippah. The list got quite extensive, and I soon found that I was taking the yamukah off, far more than I was putting it on, and I felt guilty, like I was a horrible Jew.

I shared this with one of my professors and what he taught me changed my whole perspective. He reminded me, why I wanted to wear it in the first place, so that I would be reminded of God's presence in my life every day. And then he suggested, instead of judging my failure by the number of times I had to take it off, I should judge my success by the number of times in a week I was doing something sacred enough to put the kippah on.

It is the same for each of us, with Shabbat, and with all things Jewish. The evaluation comes not at how much we don't do but how much we do, do. The optimistic Jew sees the bagel, the pessimist the hole.