

Phoenix

English 10

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### The Flame of Shabbat

As I step out into the bitter cold of a winter's night, exhaustion runs through my veins. The expanse in front of me is a monochrome landscape of black and blue painted with the occasional warm glow of a flickering street light. My cheeks are red with the weariness in my blood, and my lungs icy with the bite of winter. The streets are now deserted, as if the entire world has retreated into the warmth of their homes. The bare trees surrounding me stand like tall skeletons, stripped of their warm flesh. I pull my jacket tight around my waist and shove my hands into the pockets, struggling to conserve my remaining warmth. The air is quiet, as if it, too, is conserving its energy for the treacherous night ahead. I, however, have the promise of warmth, while my frozen surroundings do not, shrouded in an eternal blanket of snow.

When thinking of the weekly Jewish holiday, Shabbat, I am often reminded of lighting the two candles that welcome the Sabbath amidst these black Friday evenings. These Shabbat nights provide me with so much more than the light and warmth of two flames. They provide a sense of relief, of relaxation. As the night unfolds, my family and I come together as we engage in prayer and bless the different elements of our Shabbat table. The candles, glasses filled with wine and grape juice, and Challah bread. This bread is traditionally eaten on Shabbat nights and is composed of three strands of dough, delicately braided together, creating intricate swirls and crevices. It is sweet and decadent, glistening as it emerges from the oven, covered in golden egg wash, reflecting every beam of light surrounding it. These Friday nights are also filled with an

unlikely symphony of aromas. Burning wicks, sweet bread, pungent wine, melting wax, trails of smoke, syrupy grape juice. Shabbat has its own unique smell, something I could recognize instantly. It is this combination of light, food, drink, and prayer that ground me at the end of the week and bring warmth to my life. That allow my worries to melt away, like a candle's wax as it burns to a mere puddle. As the flames of Friday night die out, descending into slumber with the rest of the household, Shabbat does not simply come to an end.

I wake up Saturday morning. I dress in my nicest clothes, and proceed to Synagogue. There, I teach younger kids prayers that they will eventually lead the congregation in at their bar and bat mitzvahs. These mornings serve to distinguish Shabbat from the rest of the week as I transition from the role of student to teacher. My usual weekdays are marked with learning, where I constantly absorb knowledge. However, on Shabbat, I have the opportunity to give my knowledge to others. I am responsible for passing down the torch of tradition, and continuing the rich legacy of Judaism. Knowing that I have this obligation, I am much more centered than any other time in my week, because my work furthers the development of my culture. Looking at my prayer book, I am also reminded of how different this day is from others. Hebrew letters dance in front of me, swimming, begging to be taught, chanted. I turn the left page to the right, my eyes moving right to left, feeling a sense of comfort in this reversal of the norm. Seeing thousands of letters through those translucent pages, stacked on top of one another, creating an unspeakable story of tradition. The towering stack whispering to me in unintelligible tongue that there is so much more to pass down. This is why I find so much importance in these mornings of education.

Many of my friends also work as teachers at my synagogue, and after teaching, we often gather at one of our homes. I find immense comfort in these moments, as we spend time with one another. Within the walls of our houses, our collective spirit reaches much farther than this

enclosure. We consciously refrain from using technology and transcend the demands of work. We simply live in the moment, conversing. It is not every day that I am in a Jewish-dominated setting, and being with friends who share something so personal and profound brings a sense of belonging. In those moments, we are our own congregation. Dressed in our most uncomfortable clothing, but wearing it as a symbol of respect for each other and our people. Our conversations are akin to whispered prayers enriched with words of joy and connection. Words flow from our mouths, rich like the milk and honey promised to our ancestors. Our expressions transform into their own form of ancient psalms. As I look around at these gatherings, I am provided with brief and inspiring glimpses into who the Jewish people will become, each of us a candle illuminating our people's dark past. These glimpses are short, but undoubtedly very real. I am reminded that I am an integral part of the future of my community, and that every Jew is a part of our collective.

To end Shabbat, Jews perform a ritual called Havdalah on Saturday night, which involves lighting a candle of braided wax, aromatic spices, wine, and prayer. This ceremony is almost reminiscent of the one that first welcomed in Shabbat, one that incorporates candles, braids, distinct smells, wine, and prayer. The cycle of warmth, tradition, and community have passed. The week, like a familiar shadow, inches closer, surrounding the glow of the Havdalah candle. As Havdalah comes to an end, the still-lit braided candle is flipped, its flame scorched in a glass of wine. Its crackling sizzle marks the end of Shabbat, and the room grows dark. But the feelings of Shabbat carry over into the week ahead. And each Friday night, just as those feelings begin to dwindle, as the sky grows dark, as the night grows silent and cold, two candles are lit.