

November 2014

Shabbat Project

When is a challah just a challah? -- When it is bought at a bakery or baked at home, and enjoyed by family and friends at a Shabbat table on a Friday night. Challah is an aesthetically pleasing, sweet, salty, golden-brown reminder of our tradition's beauty and history. It is undoubtedly one of the best parts of Shabbat (and also is not a bad addition to a Sunday morning when it becomes French toast)!

When is a challah a symbol of international unity, shared heritage and global solidarity? – When it is mixed, kneaded and braided at a Challah Bake event with 800 people on a Thursday night.

The Challah Bake provided a clear sign that we, Jewish women and all Jews everywhere, are not alone. I attended the Challah Bake in Orange County with my mom, my sister, my sister-in-law, and my niece. I heard that a couple women from Temple Etz Rimon attended the Challah Bake event in San Diego County. My family had quite an experience, meeting new people and getting reacquainted with old friends, singing Shabbat songs under the stars, and learning about the obligation to make challah and the spiritual symbolism of each ingredient used to make the dough. Eight hundred women in Orange County and close to 1,500 in San Diego prepared for Shabbat together! And that was just the beginning of the Shabbos Project celebration!

The Shabbos Project brought Jews all over the world together in a shared experience of Shabbat. Known internationally as International Shabbat and known locally as Shabbat San Diego, the weekend began with the Challah Bake, continued with Shabbat dinners, Shabbat services, and Shabbat study sessions, and concluded with community Havdalah services on Saturday night. The Project was envisioned one year ago by Rabbi Dr. Warren Goldstein, Chief Rabbi of South Africa. Last year at this time, the majority of South Africa's diverse Jewish community joined together to observe a single Shabbat. The idea grew, and Rabbi Goldstein set out to unite all Jews everywhere in a unique, international, grassroots Jewish identity movement. In just one year, he accomplished his goal!

Internationally, 212 cities in 33 countries participated in The Shabbos Project; locally, the celebration was one of the largest Jewish events in San Diego history. Event coordinators reported that Shabbat San Diego touched over 10,000 people in our town. More than 7,500 people participated in Shabbat dinners hosted in the San Diego area. Twenty-three community Shabbat dinners were held in San Diego, with attendance at each one ranging from 30 to 520. In addition, there were 48 privately-hosted dinners, each with more than 50 people. There were dozens more private Shabbat dinners hosted by families for their own family members, friends and congregants. And this only accounts for Friday night!

On Saturday, the celebration continued. Synagogues and other organizations hosted 22 lectures and study sessions across the county. There were several community children's activities and recreational programs. A number of Se'udah Shlishit (Shabbat afternoon meals) were hosted on Saturday afternoon. Finally, about 1,600 children and adults attended Saturday night's Havdalah program, and more than twice that number wanted to attend but were told the event was sold out. In all, 41 out of 44 local congregations participated in Shabbat San Diego. This included almost every major Jewish agency and youth group, as well as 40 additional organizations including almost all of the day schools, afternoon supplementary schools and preschools.

The celebration also included Temple Etz Rimon! Our congregation established our place on the map with our own congregational Shabbat dinner and service. Taking our place in our county and in the Jewish world, we enjoyed a traditional Shabbat dinner followed by a Kabbalat Shabbat service while sitting at our tables. Our service was full of energy and Shabbat joy, and we also had the pleasure of wishing a mazel tov to Zsi Zsi and Dan Potsdam on their 65th wedding anniversary. Thank you to Alex Laifer who served as our coordinator, helping to facilitate our participation and serving as liaison with the Shabbat San Diego planning committee. Thank you to Estelle Altork who welcomed our guests at the door. Thank you to Karen Linick who prepared a delicious Shabbat meal for us. Thanks to Vince, Alex, Nathaniel, Bess, Hailey and Fiderly who helped in the kitchen, set up tables, served dinner, and cleaned up after our service. Thanks to Judy Devor, Zsi Zsi Potsdam, and Zsi Zsi's grandson Mitch who arrived early and helped with set-up, and thanks to Athena Turrey, Lori Hellman and Debbie DeCapua for staying late to help clean up. Lastly, thank you to Josh Friedman for planning and leading the service with me, and for bringing his music and his voice to our celebration.

The results of the weekend were overwhelming and far exceeded the expectations here at home and across the globe. Selwyn Isakow, Chair of the Shabbat San Diego Oversight Committee, wrote that the commitment and effort in San Diego "...enabled us to create unity and respect across the denominations and bring those unaffiliated or lesser affiliated out to enjoy Shabbat in a meaningful way." I hope our congregation will participate again next year, and I can't wait to see how the movement will continue to explode around the world. For more information and to read stories and see pictures from the weekend, check out the web site: theshabbosproject.org.

One of my favorite scenes in the play and film Fiddler on the Roof is the Shabbat meal. Golde (the mother) lights the candles, and then the audience sees the same ritual repeated in all the homes in the town. In every home, someone lights the candles, covers the eyes, and quietly recites the traditional blessing over the Shabbat candles. The scene evokes the awe and wonder of Shabbat peace and tranquility, and it demonstrates the beauty and the unity of the shared Shabbat experience.

Shabbat San Diego reminded me of that scene. I could just imagine all those people all over San Diego and all across the world, lighting all those candles, chanting Kiddush while lifting all those wine glasses, blessing all those spouses and all those children, and eating all that challah.

Ironically though, while this particular Shabbat was so special in some ways, it really was not so extraordinary. Shabbat is *always* a shared experience. Shabbat is *always* observed across the world, at the same time (depending on various time zones), with the same prayers, and with similar music, foods, customs and traditions. Millions of Jews bake and eat challah every Friday, all year long. But something about this celebration reminded us that we are part of *K'lal Yisrael* – the entire community of Israel. We were reminded of our shared history. We were reminded that Shabbat still has its place in our time. Most significantly, we were reminded that we are not alone.

Thank God for challah!

Thank God for Shabbat holiness.

Thank God for Shabbat peace.