Shalom, Shabbat! National Webinar Transcript
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Melissa Rosen:

Thank you so much for joining us today. I am so glad that you're here with us at this moment. Here we go. Welcome. Welcome to Sharsheret's Shalom Shabbat program. My name is Melissa Rosen. I'm the director of training and education at Sharsheret, and I am happy to say that many of my wonderful colleagues are also joining us today. We are always grateful, always grateful for an opportunity to reconnect and to recenter, and I'm glad we're doing that together. I want to thank our sponsors for today's program, Daiichi Sankyo, GSK, and Merck. A couple of housekeeping items. You were muted as you enter today's program. Please stay on mute so that we can clearly hear today's presenters.

As always, this program is being recorded and, of course, no names or faces will show on the recording, other than those of the presenters. But, if you wish to turn your video off of privacy now, the option to do so is also on the bottom left of your screen. You can choose to rename yourself, if you prefer to remain anonymous, by clicking the three dots on the top right of your square. Anyone who registered will be notified when the recording and transcript for today's program is posted on the Sharsheret website. Please feel free to share it with anyone you think might enjoy it.

Let's talk about a chance to press pause. Sometimes, during these quarterly programs, we focus on a specific theme. We've considered different holidays. We've explored meditation as a form of rest, and I believe our very first one, we debated the merits of honey versus salt on our Shabbat challah. Today, we're taking it back to basics. As we've discussed in previous Shalom Shabbat programs, there is always, always, always some level of chaos in life, work, family, volunteer commitments.

And, of course, for those of us who have faced cancer and are dealing with survivorship or who are currently facing cancer, there's even more chaos, physical, emotional, and even spiritual chaos. And we all need a break. We need an opportunity to take a breath, a deep breath. It is absolutely necessary for our happiness and even for our physical health. During these programs, we often talk about the pause that Shabbat provides, no matter how we observe or celebrate it, or whether we observe or celebrate it.

But today, instead of focusing on the importance of that pause, which we already understand is necessary, we're going to look at rest from a different perspective. As we face the side effects of both cancer and the treatments for cancer, we're often instructed to rest, almost as if it's a prescription. And, in some ways, it is. Resting is following doctor's orders, and for some, the way Shabbat is celebrated is also prescribed.

For some, being told to rest is just what they need. But for others it's more complicated. Today, some of my Sharsheret colleagues are going to share some insights and maybe even make some suggestions about how to embrace rest and rejuvenation. So I want to begin by introducing Rachel Teicher, Sharsheret's Support Program manager. Rachel, you are muted.

Rachel Teicher:

Hello. Again, I'm Rachel Teicher, one of the social workers at Sharsheret. So nice to have you all here with us. I wanted to basically start by saying, "Hi, I'm here as your social worker friend today." Some of you may know me as your social worker and for some of you, I'm just another social worker on the team but Today I am here to be the social worker for you all and almost, in a way, be protective of you. I want to be mindful of everybody's feelings and just start things off in that way. Its almost like I'm going to be today's dose of reality thrown in, with all the happiness and positivity that, of course, this program and lots of other meaningful programs bring, we also understand, obviously, that it's important to remember that this is hard.

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All of this is hard, whether it be you're currently in the thick of a diagnosis or in survivorship or if your a caregiver or anything in between, this is all hard to deal with and that unfortunately is part of the reality of it. And that's okay to sometimes just say, "This is all hard." I want to recognize that concept, and what do I mean by that? We recognize that the word, "rest," and I know Melissa very briefly started touching on this in her introduction, but the word, "rest," or the concept of rest can be scary and overwhelming because it's often thrown at you a lot in this experience. It's ironic how something that is meant to be positive is actually stressful and overwhelming for some to hear.

That might not be true for everyone. Some people might love the concept of rest and some might not. So what do we mean by all this? What does it mean that it can be stressful or difficult to rest? Because that also sounds funny to say, right? Resting is meant to do nothing, so how could that be hard? So with cancer or any illness, there's this concept of forced rest. You're going to have treatment, you're going to have surgeries, you're going to take medications or anything in between, and people are always reminding you, "Make sure you rest, make sure you relax, make sure you take care of yourself." Especially during those big times of a treatment or a surgery this happens. And you're like, "Okay. Yeah, duh. I know that." Sometimes you probably want to actually look at people and say, "Okay, duh. Thanks. I know I'm supposed to rest. I know I'm recovering." And then there is the doctor, right? Doctors are guilty of this too, not just your loved ones and friends and family, so then the doctor says to you- "Oh, you have to rest. You have to relax." But for some that can sound like, "Oh, my gosh, what does that mean? What do I do?" Now you feel pressure added to something that's meant to be not filled with pressure.

That happens because, for some people, simply the idea of doing nothing is more stressful. You're used to being active and distracted and you're now being forced to literally stop doing those things. That seems unfair and not okay because that's just another thing that cancer's adding to the list. It's like learning a new concept for yourself, to actually force yourself to sit down and do nothing.

And, for some people, rest is something they're used to, something they enjoy. Just taking a pause, taking a break, sitting on the couch and doing nothing or just whatever rest means for them, that's something that they usually incorporate. So that concept isn't scary, but maybe because of what life is right now, you can't do the things that you were used to. So you have to find a new meaning to what rest is for you, or relaxing is, because you have to do it in a different way, and that's also a forced change.

So, basically, the concept is finding a new way to find relaxation and peace and calm in your life. Regardless of that, what we want to recognize today, obviously, is that cancer can throw a giant wrench in things. We know that. It changes things in ways you thought you could imagine and also that you couldn't have imagined. It takes away this concept of having control and you often feel like you can't control what's happening around you.

And it happens to be that one of the concepts that all of us on the team of social workers discuss is trying to take control of the things that you can. So this can be one of those things, like how you rest, how you feel peace and calm. That can be something you can choose to take control of and do what you want, what's good for you, not what everyone else around you is trying to tell you to do. So while this whole concept of the Sabbath is truly “forced rest”, the hope is that, through today's program, you can look at the Sabbath or rest, or in general this concept, through meaningful eyes. And you'll hear some more really special, beautiful and meaningful information and ideas for that from my colleague, Erin, later.

So I'm going to stop it there and let her continue. But I want to one more time, just recognize this- We know that it's so important to rest, but we also recognize that can be hard, and we hope that today helps you find meaning and takes the pressure out of that for you.

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Melissa Rosen:

Thank you so much, Rachel. That actually really resonated. What I want to do now is spotlight our special guest. Cantor Lilah Sugarman believes in empowering individual voices to create inclusive sacred communities through song, through study, through celebration. Cantor Lilah grew up in Los Angeles where she worked and volunteered at her home synagogue, Kehillat Israel. She attended San Diego State University, and in 2012, Cantor Lilah began pursuing her lifelong dream of becoming a cantor at the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music at Hebrew Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion, where she received her Master in Sacred Music and was ordained.

Cantor Lilah has served communities in New York, in New Jersey, Los Angeles, and currently she serves as Senior Clergy and Soul Spiritual Leader at United Jewish Center in Danbury, Connecticut. At United Jewish Center, she collaborates with lay leaders to foster relationships and create meaningful Jewish experiences. She's interested in engaging in full body Judaism that engages the mind, the body, and the spirit. And she explores this idea in the intersection of movement and prayer through how she leads prayer, teaches music. And, actually, in yoga classes, Cantor Lila is a 200-hour certified Vinyasa yoga instructor.

She does live in Danbury with her husband and their three cats, Jude, Atticus, and Roche. She's going to be joining us today to sing two songs, and as she introduces herself or says a couple of words before she starts, I'm going to put the lyrics up on the screen. Welcome. You must also be having trouble. Hold on one sec. I'm sorry for the technical difficulties. You should now be able to unmute yourself. There we go.

Lilah Sugarman:

Thank you. Thank you so much for that kind introduction and [foreign language 00:11:59], good morning, or [foreign language 00:12:01], good afternoon, depending on where you're joining us from. I'm so honored and grateful to be here and to be able to nourish each other and to nourish ourselves through song. And the beautiful thing is that we are all muted, so you're welcome to join and to sing as loud as you want. We'll be able to see each other joining in song and it's such a beautiful thing to do when our voices come together.

So the first prayer, or song, I wanted to start with, Oseh Shalom, is our Prayer of Peace. And in our tradition, on Shabbat, on this time of rest, it is a tradition that we don't ask for things, that we are just honoring what is. We are pausing and enjoying all of creation, but that we don't typically ask for things or pray for things to happen. But we do pray for peace. That is one of those exceptions. And in our tradition, peace, the word peace, shalom, comes from the word [foreign language 00:13:05], wholeness. They share the same root.

And I love this because, when we pray for peace, we're not praying for a lack of something. We're not praying for a lack of war or a lack of strife. We are praying for wholeness, for peace and wholeness. So as you join together in singing Oseh Shalom with me, I invite you to think of how you can create a sense of wholeness for yourself as we come together in song.

(singing)

Melissa Rosen:

Thank you so much. That was so beautiful. That really was. Okay. We're going to replace Spotlight. As promised, I want to welcome to our screen one of Sharsheret's wonderful Support Program coordinators, Erin Weinreich, to share some additional insights on making rest not just enjoyable, but manageable. Erin, welcome.

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Erin Weinreich:

Thank you so much, Melissa and Rachel, and to Lilah, for sharing those beautiful words of that prayer, Oseh Shalom. Shalom, which means peace. And that's a perfect transition into what I wanted to talk about today here with you guys. So, as Rachel mentioned briefly, the actual word Shabbat means to rest. And in this context of Shabbat, it could look a little forced, being told that this is the day that we rest and this is the time that we rest and this is what we could be doing to create that rest.

But rest can and does look different for each and every individual. And for some that might look like the traditional way, completely shutting off from technology and other physical activities such as working, transportation, but the ability to also spend time with friends and family and being present can also look like a good way of resting. And that might look different for everyone, on a different day, a different time, and a different space to create that sense of rest and peace, whether that's with nature or a hobby, cooking or cleaning or spending time doing mindless things or just having fun.

I think the point is just to have that break from the stress of what might be going on in your life, from being diagnosed to treatment plans, to surgeries, to dealing with your family members and caregivers or being a caregiver while you're going through this experience. So the idea of rest can also be looked at from this sense of taking a break. And, like we said, that could seem sometimes forced and even more stressful than we really want it to be or need it to be.

Some people might find that rest and peace to be that cause of stress, which is counterintuitive to what the whole idea of rest and peace looks like or should look like. And in relation to a cancer diagnosis, there might be a feeling, in general, just a loss of control, not being able to control what the diagnosis is, how it's treated, where it's treated, what the plans are for moving forward. And that's something now that we can sit in from a different perspective and recognize that what rest looks like to you is in your control. And it just might be changing that perspective of how we come about the idea of rest and peace and that break.

And so, to conclude, I think that the point and the importance of this whole conversation is that each individual, we need to look deep inside of ourselves to find what that is that brings us peace and how we can execute that and bring that into our Shabbat, whenever that is, and however that looks like, without it feeling pressured or forced. And really just lean in to that idea that what rest looks like to me might not look like what rest looks like to my caregiver or my family. And that's perfectly okay because it's individual and unique to you.

Melissa Rosen:

Thank you. Thank you so much. Sorry, I was delayed because I was writing that down. What rest looks like to me might not be what rest looks like to you. That is so very, very true. Okay, I am really excited to be able to welcome Cantor Lila back to the screen. She has one more song and I... Oh, there we go. She has one more song she's going to share and I am putting that up on the... There we go. I'm putting that up on the screen right now.

Lilah Sugarman:

Thank you so much. The other melody may have been familiar to you and to many of us, and this one might be new, and so I want to learn it together. This is by a beautiful, strong Jewish musician, Michelle Citrin, and it talks about honoring the sacred space that we create on Shabbat. Abraham Joshua Heschel, a wonderful rabbi and activist, he wrote that, "Shabbat is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be; not to own, but to give; not to take, but to share; not to subdue, but to be in accord."

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Our prayers allow us to come, be present in the sacred moment and, without judgment, just enjoy wherever we are. And that can be really hard sometimes, but our prayers, bringing our voices together, help us to bring ourselves into our body, bring ourselves into that sacred moment and bring ourselves into our breath.

The other thing that I wanted to just bring forth is this idea of the joy of Shabbat. We're talked a lot about the rest of Shabbat, and our traditional also talks about the joy of Shabbat. And one of my teachers taught that joy, in our tradition, is not just a sense of happiness, but joy is feeling whatever feelings we are feeling fully and to notice whatever they are and to be present for them.

And, for me, that is what that sense of wholeness we sing about is, to experience that joy. So I hope, as we learn this new prayer together, or maybe new to some to some of you, that you're able to feel that sense of joy, of connecting to whatever you're feeling right now in this sacred moment. So I'm going to repeat the chorus at the beginning and the end, and please join me as you become comfortable with it.

(singing)

Melissa Rosen:

Wow. Wow. Thank you so much. That was a beautiful way to enter Shabbat this week. I could feel myself relaxing while you were singing. Thank you so much for joining us today to share your voice and your insights. It has been wonderful. Thank you. Before we conclude, I want your input. Each time we share a Shalom Shabbat program, we have you join in what we call a waterfall exercise.

So, I want to ask you to think about this. What is your Shabbat? In other words, how do you re-energize, both physically and emotionally, whether it's traditional or innovative, whether active or passive, whether you like to spend time alone or you join with other people. Type your answer into the chat now, but don't hit enter yet. We're going to count down in a minute and everybody's going to post at the same time. And we'll see this beautiful waterfall of inspiration on our screens. So start typing now.

Okay. I'm going to count down and when I say, "Post," everybody hits send, hit enter. Three, two, one, enter. Whoa, I love that. So nice. A couple of people said, "Singing together." Somebody said, "Nature," which I totally resonate with. I'm a little gratified to see more than one person say, "Be alone," because I sometimes feel guilty that I want some downtime for just me. Of course, a lot of family and friends and someone said, this could have been someone I know, someone said, "I go to the farm and spend time with goats and sheep." I love that.

For some people, animals mean so much and somebody else said, their cats. And you know what? Somebody said, "I haven't been doing anything until now." And that's totally okay. Find a time to make your own Shabbat. Whenever, and whatever that means to you, find a time to do that. Okay, our time is quickly coming to an end, so just a couple of notes. As we conclude, once more, thank you to Daiichi Sankyo, GSK, and Merck. And a special thanks to Cantor Lilah Sugarman. Her voice added so much to today's program.

Thanks to my colleagues, Rachel and Erin, and a shout-out to Elenna who worked behind the scenes today. I want to remind you that Sharsheret is here for you. Our social workers, two of whom joined, probably more than two, but two of whom spoke today, are available to answer your questions, provide support, and connect you to resources. You can reach them through the email in the chat box that went up just a second to go. I also want to let you know that we will be holding our second annual Virtual Tashlich program on Friday, September 22nd, 12:30 Eastern, 9:30 Pacific.

During this program, we'll explore how to make the new year meaningful in face of cancer and survivorship. When we send our follow-up email out next week, so anyone who registered, for this

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program, there'll be an active link to register for the next program. And finally, going into our chat box right now is a link for a very brief three-question evaluation survey. Please take just a minute to share your thoughts on today's Shalom Shabbat. We're going to get that in the chat box right now, right there. Wishing you all a Shabbat filled with comfort, relaxation, and joy. Bye-bye.

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