

Hashkiveinu Iyyun

Shabbat Shalom! We have just concluded the emblematic prayer “Mi Chamocha” which recounts the experience of being freed from slavery in Egypt, with the help, guidance, and protection of Adonai. It is ever so fitting that the following prayer is Hashkiveinu. After being emancipated from our cruel, but dependable existence in Egypt, we look ahead with sudden uncertainty.

For thousands of years, people viewed evening and darkness as dangerous times during which demons, criminals, or wild beasts might prey upon us. We are therefore particularly vulnerable as we sleep. In Hashkiveinu, we begin by asking God to “lay us down in peace and raise us up again to life”. We then extend this plea, asking God for peace, guidance, and refuge from the world’s evils.

In many ways, our pleas with Adonai are no different than our desires for **any other** relationship. We yearn for safety, protection, and stability in a world that is ever-changing and unpredictable. As children, we expect this of our parents, who literally tucked us into our beds and lulled us safely to sleep. As adults, perhaps this role is filled by a companion, a lover, or a friend.

There is a strange dichotomy I experience and perhaps you can relate: When life is too predictable –dare I say monotonous—I become discontent and aspire for more. At the same time, if life is too erratic or unreliable, I crave nothing more than the comforting embrace of that very same stability.

Shabbat encompasses this duality. It is both consistent—occurring cyclically—and a deviation from the week’s usual structure. At the end of each week, no matter what transpired or how uncertain the future seems, Shabbat is here to embrace us with community, love, and music. It carves out a specific moment in time during which we can escape the daily hardships and express our immense gratitude for each dependable aspect of our lives.