



Jewish Reconstructionist Federation

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"Cosmological Shabbat," Multimedia Observance at Adat Shalom

July 23, 2009 - 3:25pm — [Gari Weilbacher](#)

Rabbi George Driesen writes about a moving Kabbalat Shabbat Friday night service comprised of images sent to earth via the Hubble Space Telescope, passages from the Bible and improvised piano music, presented by The Institute For Science and Judaism.

Congregants who recently came to welcome Shabbat at [Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation](#) participated in the first-ever cosmological celebration of a Kabbalat Shabbat Service. With a combination of images sent to earth from outer space via the Hubble Space Telescope, passages from the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible), and improvised piano music, the presentation was prepared by [The Institute For Science and Judaism \(ISJ\)](#) to augment the spiritual impact of the service.



For this unique event astrophysicist and ISJ Board member Steven Brody culled images from his collection of the most striking of NASA's "Astronomy Pictures of the Day." and organized them into a slide show, Just before the service for welcoming the Sabbath ended, the synagogue was darkened and these images were projected onto the white cloth "sails" that descend from the cupola atop the ceiling of Adat Shalom's unusual sanctuary. As the images appeared, Brody read explanations of the objects and ISJ President Rabbi George Driesen read Biblical passages from Genesis, Psalms, Isaiah and Job extolling God as Creator of the heavens and the earth. Adat Shalom congregant Michael Gottlieb improvised piano music paralleling the mood of the texts and images. The entire ensemble was conducted and directed by Adat Shalom Cantor Rachel Hirsch Epstein. As the presentation ended, and before the lights came on, she led the Congregation in singing the 92d Psalm.

The inspiration for this presentation, Rabbi Driesen explained later, was the passage in that psalm that reads "mah gadlu maasecha yah", "how awesome are thy works, O God, your thoughts are very deep." The congregation sings it every Sabbath as part of the Kabbalat Shabbat (welcoming of Sabbath") service at Adat Shalom, said Rabbi Driesen, "and the melody Cantor Epstein has taught the congregation is very beautiful and evocative." The projected images ranged from galaxies through clouds of interstellar gas in which stars are being created, dying stars, and the remains of supernovae (gas clouds left behind after a star has exploded and its matter has streamed away). The objects, unknown until the advent of modern astronomy, were extraordinarily beautiful and extravagantly colored.

The tradition characterizes the Sabbath as a "memorial of God's creation of the universe," explains Rabbi Driesen, "and in our Sabbath prayers we extol the Creator through psalms and other prayers." The Institute's mission, he said, is to foster a creative relationship between science and Judaism, and the purpose of the Sabbath Eve presentation was to augment the spiritual impact of the Kabbalat Shabbat service by displaying the wonders of God's creation before our eyes.

Apparently the effort succeeded. Many congregants expressed great enthusiasm after the service ended.

Congregant Myrna Goldenberg said that she felt "uplifted" by this occasion. I felt "awe," in the classic sense, and "reverence," she said. Another remarked that she would never look upon the psalm in the same way again because the memory of this occasion would always be part of her when she sang it in the future.

Asked about whether such a mode of Shabbat observance was compatible with the Jewish tradition, Rabbi Driesen stated that "of course halacha [Jewish law] would bar such a presentation. But it may be appropriate for congregations that do not feel bound by halacha, provided it contributes to achieving the state of mind, or, if you prefer, soul, that we hope will accompany the descent of the Sabbath Queen. Halachic observance, as I understand it, points in that direction. No innovation and no continuation of observance, works for everyone. What matters is that we hope for the same religious objectives. In this instance it is that, in our way, we will be 'refreshed' as God was when he finished "the work that He had created and made."

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re: "Cosmological Shabbat," Multimedia Observance at Adat Shalom July 25, 2009 - 1:53am — [IvanB](#)

Adat Shalom provides Washington-area Jews of all ages and backgrounds an opportunity to experience Jewish thought, ritual and culture in a vibrant and progressive community. We provide our members with tools and opportunities to locate their own personal relationship to Jewish tradition, the Jewish people, and ultimately, the world. Our statement of principles expresses it well, "Adat Shalom supports a lifelong exploration for ba'alei she'elah: Jews with questions." You will be able to be part of something new.

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hmm July 29, 2009 - 9:53am — [Modern Technologies](#) (not verified)

i dont get the part about the bible, why are more and more people bring god into science things?

[reply](#)

My late mother was sent to August 4, 2009 - 6:45am — [Miriam](#) (not verified)

My late mother was sent to Auschwitz and "sorted for extermination" by Dr. Mengele. She ducked under the rope and went with the young healthy people, which is why I can type this response.

Pure Science is Morals neutral.

Pursuit of God is Pursuit of Morality. Having a path to God is a way to keep research honest and true.

PS Have a fun week all ...we are leaving today for the World Science Fiction Convention in Montreal. Also, feel free to come north to the bi-monthly meeting of the Baltimore Science Fiction Society (www.bsfs.org)

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Offer

August 11, 2009 - 11:47am — [George](#)

What an amazing thing to offer. I do have to say that God created science and that is why he is being brought into science things more and more. I loved this article.

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I was always interested in

August 19, 2009 - 4:52am — [Lola](#) (not verified)

I was always interested in any Cosmas and especially the stars! I love to watch star rain!

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