

**B'SHALOM COLUMN**  
American Association on Mental Retardation  
Religion and Spirituality Division

**Sabbath In A Box**

If someone who is disabled cannot join his/her religious community in the celebration of Sabbath (or any other holiday), how can you take the holiday to that person? Our agency was faced with that question in recent years; some of our clients who have significant medical problems along with their developmental disabilities have found it difficult or impossible to travel to synagogue to participate in Sabbath services. Our solution will be put into effect in the coming months: we're putting Sabbath in a box!

Funded by a grant from our local Jewish community endowment fund, we are assembling boxes which will contain the items used to welcome "shabbat" (sabbath) every Friday evening. The boxes will contain a pair of candlesticks and 6 candles; a wine cup and small bottle of grape juice; headcoverings appropriate to a man or woman; a "challah" (bread) cover; a "tzedakah box" (for a traditional, small weekly charitable donation) and other items. To assist the person (or caretaker) who may have never participated in the traditions of Shabbat, we are currently writing an "instruction manual" which will include an explanation of Shabbat and it's rituals and prayers; the prayers written in Hebrew, phonetic Hebrew (transliterations) and English translations; illustrations of how one lights the candles and blesses the wine and bread; the words to typical Shabbat songs and recipes for typical Shabbat meals. An audio cassette tape will include the prayers and songs in Hebrew and English, to assist in learning pronunciations and tunes. A small, freshly baked "challah" will be added on the day the Shabbat Box is delivered.

Besides the agency staff, volunteers will be sought to visit our clients, deliver the Shabbat Box and provide explanations. The "challah cover" will be unadorned, and the volunteer will offer to decorate it with the client. (Stencils and fabric paints will be included.) This will provide an opportunity to begin a friendship which may flourish after the three visits we will ask volunteers to make to each assigned client.

Our goals are two-fold: we hope to introduce the beauty and the comforting rhythm of celebrating Shabbat each week to Jewish clients who have not been celebrating it because their families have been overwhelmed with coping with the stresses of disability or because the client no longer resides in a Jewish home. We hope to nurture the seeds of friendship between clients and the Shabbat Box volunteers as well. Volunteers will be asked to make three visits within four weeks, to assist the client in learning the Shabbat rituals. After those visits, we hope some friendships will evolve in a natural way.

If this project is successful in renewing Jewish rituals in the lives of some people who are disabled, the agency will put other holidays into a box (a Chanukah menorah and candles along with prayers and a dreidl; "hamantashen" pastries and "greggor" noisemakers for Purim, the celebration of the Book Of Esther; etc.) in the future. Perhaps there's a holiday you would like to pack up for someone who has not visited your house of worship lately?