



from *The Sabbath*, Abraham Joshua Heschel,

Judaism is a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time. Unlike the space-minded man to whom time is unvaried, iterative, homogeneous, to whom all hours are alike, quality-less, empty shells, the Bible senses the diversified character of time. There are no two hours alike. Every hour is unique and the only one given at the moment, exclusive and endlessly precious.

Judaism teaches us to be attached to holiness in time, to be attached to sacred events, to learn how to consecrate sanctuaries that emerge from the magnificent stream of a year. The Sabbaths are our great cathedrals; and our Holy of Holies is a shrine that neither the Romans nor the Germans were able to burn; a shrine that even apostasy cannot easily obliterate: the Day of Atonement. According to the ancient rabbis, it is not the observance of the Day of Atonement, but the Day itself, the “essence of the Day,” which, with man’s repentance, atones for the sins of man.

Jewish ritual may be characterized as the art of significant forms in time, as architecture of time. Most of its observances—the Sabbath, the New Moon, the festivals, the Sabbatical and the Jubilee year—depend on a certain hour of the day or season of the year. It is, for example, the evening, morning, or afternoon that brings with it the call to prayer. The main themes of faith lie in the realm of time. We remember the day of the exodus from Egypt, the day when Israel stood at Sinai; and our Messianic hope is the expectation of a day, of the end of days.

In a well-composed work of art an idea of outstanding importance is not introduced haphazardly, but, like a king at an official ceremony, it is presented at a moment and in a way that will bring to light its authority and leadership. In the Bible, words are employed with exquisite care, particularly those which, like pillars of fire, lead the way in the far-flung system of the biblical world of meaning. One of the most distinguished words in the Bible is the word *kadosh*, holy; a word which more than any other is representative of the

mystery and majesty of the divine. Now what was the first holy object in the history of the world? Was it a mountain? Was it an altar?

It is, indeed, a unique occasion at which the distinguished word *kadosh* is used for the first time: in the Book of Genesis at the end of the story of creation. How extremely significant is the fact that it is applied to time: "And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy." There is no reference in the record of creation to any object in space that would be endowed with the quality of holiness.

This is a radical departure from accustomed religious thinking. The mythical mind would expect that, after heaven and earth have been established, God would create a holy place—a holy mountain or a holy spring—whereupon a sanctuary is to be established. Yet it seems as if to the Bible it is holiness in time, the Sabbath, which comes first.

When history began, there was only one holiness in the world, holiness in time. When at Sinai the word of God was about to be voiced, a call for holiness in man was proclaimed: "Thou shalt be unto me a holy people." It was only after the people had succumbed to the temptation of worshipping a thing, a golden calf, that the erection of a Tabernacle, of holiness in space, was commanded. The sanctity of time came first, the sanctity of man came second, and the sanctity of space last. Time was hallowed by God; space, the Tabernacle, was consecrated by Moses.

While the festivals celebrate events that happened in time, the date of the month assigned for each festival in the calendar is determined by the life in nature. Passover and the Feast of Booths [Sukkot], for example, coincide with the full moon, and the date of all festivals is a day in the month, and the month is a reflection of what goes on periodically in the realm of nature, since the Jewish month begins with the new moon, with the reappearance of the lunar crescent in the evening sky. In contrast, the Sabbath is entirely independent of the month and unrelated to the moon. Its date is not determined by any event in nature, such as the new moon, but by the act of creation. Thus the essence of the Sabbath is completely detached from the world of space.

The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation, from the world of creation to the creation of the world.

A CONVERSATION ABOUT SHABBAT

with Rabbi Hannah Dresner

SOURCES and questions

- *Shabbat* = “rest,” from the Hebrew verb **שבת** (*shavat*), “ceasing [from work],” an active cessation from labor, as in the modern Hebrew word *shevita*, “labor strike.”
 - The root form **שוב** (*shuv*) = “return,” as in *teshuvah*.
 - **ישב** (*yashav*) = “sit,” “remain,” or “dwell.”
 - **שבת** (*shavat*) = “cease.”

What do these related root forms tell us about the nature of Sabbath rest?

The Fourth Commandment - *Shemot* (Exodus) 20: 9-11

Remember (“*zachor*”) the Sabbath Day to make it holy (“*l’kodsho*”). Six days you shall work and you shall do your tasks, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. You shall do no task (“*melacha*”), you or your son and your daughter, your male slave or your slave-girl and your beast and your sojourner who is within your gates. For six days did the Lord make the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in it, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore did the Lord bless the Sabbath Day and hallow it.

What is the balance with which the Torah begins?

Why are the activities we do during the six days of the week important?

What is the danger in human productivity?

In the Shabbat morning *Kiddush*, from *Shemot* (Exodus) 31:16-17

And the Israelites shall keep the Sabbath to enact the Sabbath for their generations, a perpetual covenant. Between Me and the Israelites it is a sign for all time that six days did the Lord make the heavens and the earth and on the seventh day God ceased and **וינפש** (*va-yinafash*) – caught His/Her/Their breath.

What does “va-inafash” mean?

Rabbi Reuven Hammer, *Or Chadash*

Va-yinafash = “was refreshed.”

The root of the word *nefesh* means life or soul (i.e.-that which breathes). When one rests, one infuses oneself with a new breath of life. Sabbath rest is life-enhancing.

But how can we get to that type of life-enhancing rest?

Joel Lurie Grishaver, Building A Jewish Life: Shabbat

The Torah reports that even God needs “breathers.”

“On the 7th day God rested and was refreshed.” Club Med’s marketing department understands the dynamic of *va-Yinafash*. They know the difference between leisure and recreation. Leisure is just time available. Recreation is a process through which one’s essence, is renewed. The word *va-Yinafash* is rooted in the Hebrew word *nefesh*, which means soul. A club med vacation is marketed as an opportunity to restore oneself to one’s essence. Shabbat was created as a tool for perpetual self-renewal.

Talmud Bavli Shabbat 12a

It has been taught: Rabbi Hananyah said: A person is required to examine the contents of his clothing to free it of inappropriate items on the eve of Shabbat prior to dark, for one might forget and go out without having done so. Rav Yoseph said: This is an essential law of Shabbat observance.

And what is the result?

Rabbi Naomi Levy, To Begin Again

True rest doesn’t affect us only when we are resting. It spills over into our weeks, our years, our very lives. The days preceding the day of rest become days of excitement and expectation. Even the most harried workdays become tolerable when you know a day of holy peace is shortly arriving. The days succeeding the day of rest become days of light too. They shimmer with the afterglow of a revived spirit. True rest gives us a completely different perspective on all of life’s difficulties. It allows us to heal, to reflect, to give thanks, and to face whatever lies ahead with a renewed sense of calm.

repeating: from the Shabbat morning Kiddush, from Shemot (Exodus) 31:16-17

And the Israelites shall keep the Sabbath to enact the Sabbath for their generations, a perpetual covenant. Between Me and the Israelites it is a sign for all time that six days did the Lord make the heavens and the earth and on the seventh day God ceased and **וַיִּנָּפֹשױ** (*va-yinafash*) – caught His/Her/Their breath.

What’s the covenant or bond that God is offering?

CHEVRUTA WORK

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 5:12-16

Keep (“*shamor*”) the Sabbath Day to hallow it as the Lord your God has charged you. Six days you shall work and you shall do your tasks, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. You shall do no task (“*melacha*”), you and your son and your daughter and your male slave and your slave-girl and your ox and your donkey and all your beasts and your sojourner who is within your gates, so that your male slave and your slave-girl may rest like you. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore did the Lord charge you to enact the Sabbath Day.

What does this text add?

Who is Shabbat for?

What must we refrain from doing so as to observe Shabbat? What must we Do?

What are some equivalent “melachot” in our world?

Is there value in abstaining from a particular type of “doing” or “controlling” in today’s world?

What makes you really tired?

Is there something you need to do in daily, productive life that keeps you from your truest self?

On the side of actions to cultivate, what are some soul pampering activities?

Some begin the Shabbat morning Kiddush with Isaiah 58: 13,14

If you call the Sabbath “delight” (“*oneg*”) and honor God’s holy day, and if you honor it and go not your [regular] ways, nor look to your [weekday] affairs, nor strike bargains, you will be able to delight in God.

What would it look like for us to call the Shabbat a “delight?”

What does it mean to delight in God?

BONUS ☺

In *Pirkei Avot*, The Ethics of the Sages, a collection of wise sayings of the early rabbis (until about the year 200), Rabbi Yehuda haNasi says: Which is the right path for a person to choose? - Whichever path is “*tiferet*” for that person, and “*tiferet*” for humankind. (“*Tiferet*” can mean “beauty” or “magnificence;” it can also mean “honor.”)

What would Shabbat rest look like based on this wisdom saying?

According to the texts we’ve read so far, who benefits from resting on Shabbat?

LIGHTING SHABBAT CANDLES

The Midrash has taught that the light of a person's face during the weekdays is different from the light of his face on Shabbat.

This means that on Shabbat one's inwardness is revealed, as it is written: "A man's wisdom lights up his face." This is the revelation of the extra soul.

And so, too, at large in the world, the inwardness of the *world* is revealed on the holy Shabbat. As it is written: "and there was light."

The Sages of blessed memory taught that God planted the light for the righteous in the world to come (the world that is always *coming*, that we are bringing into existence). The utterance "Let there be light" is to be found in every detail of Creation - for all the work of Creation holds a portion of that light.

It has been hidden, and on Shabbat light is revealed from that concealed source.

During the six days of the week that light exists but us seen through a darkened lens, and on Shabbat the lens is clear.

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- Put on cloths that help you cultivate a sense of Shabbat.
- Put some money in a *tzedakah* box.
- Light the candles.

Extend your hands over the candles, draw the light toward you and inwards three times, in a circular motion; then cover your eyes.

- Say the blessing:

***Baruch ata Adonay Eloheinu Melech Ha-olam
asher kidishanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu
l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat.***

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who has sanctified us with Your *mitzvot*, and instructed us to kindle the light of Shabbat.

- Now, while your eyes are still covered, add the prayer of your heart.
- Uncover your eyes, gaze at the candles, then greet everyone with blessings of good Shabbos.