



Shabbat and Creation

A more detailed analysis of the symbolic meaning of the Sabbath ritual will show that we are not dealing with obsessive over strictness but with a concept of work and rest that is different from our modern concept.

... **“Work” is any interference by man, be it constructive or destructive, with the physical world. “Rest” is a state of peace between man and nature. . .**

Any heavy work, like plowing or building, is work in this, as well as in our modern, sense. But lighting a match and pulling up a blade of grass, while not requiring any effort, are symbols of human interference with the natural process, are a breach of peace between man and nature. . . .



The Sabbath symbolizes a state of union between man and nature and between man and man. By not working – that is to say , by not participating in the process of natural and social change – man is free from the chains of time, although only for one day a week.

- Erich Fromm (1900-1980; psychoanalyst), *The Forgotten Language*



Sabbath in our time! To cease for a whole day from all business, from all work, in the frenzied hurry-scurry of our time! To close the exchanges, the workshops, and factories, to stop all railway services – great heavens! How would it be possible? The life of the world would stop beating and the world perish!

The world perish? On the contrary, - it would be saved.

- Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch, *Judaism Eternal* II:30 (1800s)

To set apart one day a week for freedom, a day on which we would not use the instruments which have been so easily turned into weapons of destruction, a day for being with ourselves, a day of detachment from the vulgar, of independence from external obligations, a day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization, a day on which we use no money, a day of armistice in the economic struggle with our fellow men and the forces of nature – is there any institution that hold out a greater hope for man’s progress than the Sabbath?

- Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*, p.28 (1975)



The solution of man’s most vexing problem will not be found in renouncing technical civilization but in attaining some degree of independence from it.

In regard to external gifts, to outward possessions, there is only one proper attitude – to have and be able to do without them. On the Sabbath we live, as it were, independent of technical civilization: we abstain from any activity that aims at remaking or reshaping the things of space. Man’s royal privilege to conquer nature is suspended on the seventh day.

- Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (1975)



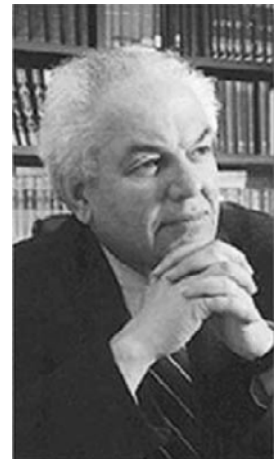
At the end of an epoch in which the human race has gained enormous knowledge and great mastery, Shabbat remains the emblem and practice of mystery. If we do not know what to do next, instead of trying to conquer our ignorance we may more fruitfully – and truthfully – celebrate Shabbat as our way of acknowledging that we do not know: that there is in the world not merely ignorance, but mystery.



- Rabbi Arthur Waskow (modern)

The setting of the sun ushers in a unit of time where the flowers of the field stand over and against man as equal member of the universe. I am forbidden to pluck the flower or to do with it as I please; at sunset the flower becomes a “thou” to me with a right to existence regardless of its possible value for me. I stand silently before nature as before a fellow creature of God and not as a potential object of my control, and I must face the fact that I am a man and not God. The Sabbath aims at healing the human grandiosity of technological society.

- Rabbi David Hartman (modern)



On the Sabbath, both humans and animals are freed from the grind of domestication; all technology, right down to the kindling of fire, is taboo. In the sabbatical year, the land itself is allowed to revert to a state of wildness. Sabbath, sabbatical and jubilee are all eruptions of wildness into the humdrum of the technical and economic order. Earth, plants, animals - even humans - are free to do as they will. So the rivers flowing from Eden leave puddles of paradise in time as well as space.

The analogy, too, can be turned on its head. If the Sabbath is a wilderness in time, then wilderness is a Sabbath in space.

Evan Eisenberg, *The Ecology of Eden* pp.130, 358