

## The Sabbath

*Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD... Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath... for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.*

*(Exodus 31:15-17, King James Version)*

The first question I had to answer in order to undertake this experience was the exact nature of the Sabbath. Was it "a day filled with stifling restrictions... a day of prayer" (*Rich*), I had to admit that I had no concept of the true meaning of the Sabbath. What would I do all day long with nothing to do? The work that is prohibited during the Sabbath is the kind that is considered "melachah" or the kind of work that is creative, or that exercises control or dominion over your environment. (*Rich*) The Jewish Sabbath is a celebration of the covenant between God and His chosen people that mirrors the creation event of Judaism, but to recognize that God is the creator "you must stop creating... otherwise it is a beautiful concept that remains in the theoretical." (*Palatnik*) In dedicating the seventh day of the week to rest, renewal and reflection on faith and family the relationship between the believer and God is strengthened. The deliberate ritual preparation gives the day the appropriate sense of holiness and allows one to make sure that one's heart and head are in the right frame to undertake the Sabbath. This undistracted time allows one to focus without the diversions with which we surround, and insulate, ourselves.

The thought of turning off our computers, tablets, televisions and cell phones is frightening to most of us who feel that these things are an essential extension of ourselves. As Friday night approached I was frankly worried that I would be simply paralyzed with boredom without all of the things I use to connect with friends and family and to keep my mind occupied. The life of the average American is about doing, when we first meet someone our first question is often, "What do you do?" I am a doer, I work and have online classes, and I watch TV and read books on my tablet. The Sabbath forces one to shift their paradigm from doing to being, from "What do you do?" to "Who are you?" That was the question that the Sabbath forces one to answer and the answer is not always the one we desire.

My experience with Christianity is a somewhat freeform version. I do not regularly attend church services because I have found most to be disingenuous and superficial. Judaism is very structured in its practice and my goal was to treat the day with the reverence it deserved. I was surprised by the lists of things that were prohibited on the Sabbath, such as writing, or heating anything, driving, or tearing off pieces paper towel or toilet paper. (*Palatnik*) How would I have my coffee if I could not heat water? I planned my Sabbath experience for several days in advance by researching kosher foods and wine, writing down all of the various prayers and blessings and making sure I had everything that I needed nearby. As the sun went down on Friday night I was admittedly very nervous about what the next 24 hours would bring.

I spent much of the Sabbath in my bedroom as my husband had chosen not to partake in the day with me, he felt that it was somewhat disrespectful to have a Jewish Sabbath if one was not a Jew. For Sabbath dinner I broke out the nice tablecloth and the good dishes, I attempted to make traditional dishes. I spent the day before baking the Challah and preparing a Chicken soup with matzah balls that I could make in the crock pot; I also baked fish and made a salad. I did not feel brave enough to attempt the blessings in Hebrew and so I looked for English translations that I could use. The reverence of the meal is enhanced by the blessings that are said over the food, and the people at the meal elevate the experience to something more than dinner in front of the TV. One takes the time to savor each bite because it feels more important, more sacred.

I put my bedside table lamp on a timer so that it would go off approximately when I thought I would be going to sleep. I spent much of the rest of Friday night reading my Bible and some commentaries. My usual practice of writing notes in the margins was impossible since writing is forbidden on the Sabbath. It was difficult in the beginning not to reach for the cell phone and the quiet sometimes was deafening. Saturday morning I walked to my local grocery to pick up a few things and I found that time to be really enjoyable. It was during this time outside and walking that I began to really feel the synchronicity with the experience of the Sabbath. I felt the freedom of letting go of what I do, and enjoyed just being who I am. It was at this point that I stopped trying so hard to be meticulous with the regulations of the Sabbath and started to use that time to recharge. I let my mind wander, I talked to God as if He was right there with me, the connection that I desired had manifested itself.

As the end of the Sabbath approached I felt a little sad, this was a day dedicated to building deep human and divine relationships yet we so often exist in the superficial. By taking the time to say a blessing over those that you love, to appreciate the blessings that we have been given, and to savor this short life we live in, the here and now, the pressures of what we do become less important. Those of us who work Monday through Friday 9-5 so often think of weekends as a time where we can vegetate and escape by distraction or diversion. The truth is that many of us, me

included, live our lives today in a perpetual state of disconnection. However, I fear we are disconnecting from the wrong things. We disconnect from our families, our minds, our faith and each other. Turn off your phone, take a walk, read God's word and talk to Him and to those you love because all of these things are sacred and enrich our lives here, and allow us to enrich others.

#### **Works Cited**

Palatnik, Lori. *The Laws of Shabbat for Beginners*. n.d. <http://www.aish.com/sh/l/48971331.html>. 05 02 2012.

Rich, Tracey R. *Judaism 101*. n.d. <http://www.jewfaq.org/shabbat.htm>. 05 02 2012.