

REL 402 - Judaism - Sabbath

I chose to honor the Jewish religion by keeping their sacred day of worship, the Sabbath. I chose this topic because I really wanted to try to do the whole ritual the way I would if I were in fact Jewish.

First I got candles to light for the beginning and end of the ritual. I looked up the readings from the Torah to read and meditate on while in my time of worship and I made sure I had no electronics around me and definitely no cell phone.

So at around 6:15 on Friday, I lit my candle and began my first Jewish Celebration. I read the Parashah, which is the weekly reading read at Synagogue, for this week, which was Exodus 13:17-17:16. This reading was the story of Moses leading the "Children of Israel" out of Egypt and out of slavery from under the Pharaoh. In the story the people were walking and there was a cloud that was a manifestation of God in front of them during the daylight hours, and at night it turned into a pillar of fire. This was meant to lead them on their journey. As they were walking the Pharaoh realized that his slaves were gone, so he got a group of 600 men together and went out into the desert after them. The people and Moses saw this and they began to get fearful and regret leaving Egypt. But God spoke to Moses and reassured him that no harm would come to his people. He instructed Moses to keep going and when they reached the sea to use his staff to strike the ground so that the great sea should open up. So Moses did as God instructed him and struck the ground, and the sea rose up to form walls. The people walked across the path that God had just opened up for them and they all made it safely to the other side of the sea. The Pharaoh and his men arrived at the sea and saw that it was parted, so they began to try to enter the tunnel that God had made, with their horses and chariots, and God released the waters and they were all engulfed by the sea. It says that no Egyptians survived. After this the people were so happy and overjoyed. They said, *"I will sing to the Lord, for very exalted is He; a horse and its rider He cast into the sea"* (Exodus 15:1). The people all rejoiced in the Lord and were happy. So they continued on their journey.

Three days passed and they came into the land of Marah but they still could not find any water to drink. The water at Marah was bitter so they could not drink it. So they began to complain to Moses of their thirst. Moses spoke to God and He made the water sweet so they were able to drink. They continued on their journey. Then again they said they should never have left Egypt because they could have died old and fat and not in this desert. So Moses spoke to God once again and He told them that in the morning they would have bread and in the nighttime they would have meat. So it was so in the evening their camp was overwhelmed with quail, and in the morning there was a sort of film on the vegetation that resembled bread. So Moses ordered that everyone get their own portion and they ate. On the sixth day God spoke to Moses and told him to tell the people that they should collect twice their allotment since the seventh day was the Sabbath they were not to work and harvest on that day. Most of them did as the Lord commanded, but some didn't listen and tried to harvest on the Sabbath and God provided no food for them. God spoke to Moses and asked "Why do my people refuse to follow my commandments?" Then the people did as God asked and went to harvest on the six days and rested on the seventh. Their journey continued this way for forty years until they came to the land of Canaan.

During my Sabbath ritual I thought about what God was trying to tell me through this story. I think God was trying to teach us that we need to trust in him and he will provide for us. Because over and over again in this story the people would be in want and he would give whatever they needed to survive this long journey into the desert. I also think that God was testing Moses to see if he could be the kind of leader that God needed him to be. This was a huge undertaking for Moses and he had to be the go-between for his people to God. It could not have been easy for him to be in the middle of the people's discontent and still trying to do as he was being commanded by the Lord.

After contemplating the meaning of the Parashah I went to bed. In the morning I read the scriptures again and sat in prayerful silence. This being a day of rest I just sat around and contemplated what it would be like to have this tradition every week. Although it was peaceful and gave me a lot of time to really ponder the readings to find their deeper meaning it felt like it was forever. I guess when Judaism is your chosen faith and you go to temple and have a faith community to worship with it probably doesn't feel that way but for me, being a Roman Catholic where we just go to Mass once a week for about an hour this was an eternity.

That being said I think that taking this time specifically to try to do what the Jews do on a weekly basis did give me a certain respect for them and their religion. Judaism is a big commitment and to really be a practicing Jew and live the Mitzvot, which are the six hundred and thirteen commandments that they live by is truly a lifestyle choice. Jews tie ethical principles and how they live to every facet of their life as they are one in the same. The six hundred and thirteen commandments along with all their long-standing traditions come together to create what they call Halakhah, which means "walk". Walk as in "this is the walk or lifestyle". It takes much to be a true Jewish person and live according to their laws. Their religion is steeped in rich and ancient tradition. Some of their tradition is hard for me as a non-Jew to relate to, so I do not think that this ritual was an easy one for me but it did teach me a lot so I am glad I did it.