

Weekly Teaching

July 20, 2018

This week's teaching was a collaborative effort with Rev. Dr. Heather Wright. Heather and I regularly teach together and contribute a joint column periodically for the Greenwich Sentinel on behalf of [Temple Shalom](#) and the [Center for Hope and Renewal](#).

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Mitch

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Space for Sabbath?

By Rabbi Mitchell M. Hurvitz and Rev. Dr. Heather Wright

Are there practices that can ground us in our harried and pressured lives?

Scripture tells us, "Honor the Sabbath."

This is one of the 10 commandments, but do we know what it really means?

Rabbi Mitch's Jewish Perspective on the Sabbath (Shabbat):

Ahad Ha'Am was a late 19th century/early 20th century Jewish-Zionist leader and poet.

He embraced Jewish culture, but did not perceive himself as religious.

Ironically, his statement on Jews' Sabbath observance is perhaps the most often quoted by modern rabbis today.

Ahad Ha'Am noted that "as much as Jews have kept the Sabbath, even more so the Sabbath has kept the Jews."

The Hebrew word for Sabbath is Shabbat, and every Jew is supposed to scrupulously "observe and remember the Shabbat;" just as the 4th Commandment emphasizes for us.

Shabbat is supposed to be the Jews' Brit Olam; their eternal sign of their covenantal relationship with God.

Zachor Shabbat—Remember the Sabbath—are the ritually prescribed actions we perform each week so as to fulfill our Sabbath duties.

A few examples:

- Light Sabbath candles before sunset on Friday and recite the blessing that thanks God and signifies our specific intention to sanctify our Sabbath
- Share a formal Sabbath meal with the singing of traditional blessings and Hebrew songs
- Attend Sabbath services at a synagogue on both Friday Night and Saturday Morning
- Study Jewish Sacred Texts

Shamor Shabbat—Observe the Sabbath—are the ritually prohibited actions we observe so as to fulfill our Sabbath duties.

A few examples:

- Refrain from spending money
- Refrain from non-sacred work
- Refrain from kindling fire
- Refrain from driving

Jews who take the time to meaningfully observe the Sabbath find themselves cultivating a strong anchoring within Jewish religious and communal life.

The Jews observance of the Sabbath facilitates our creating an “Island within Time;” we take a step away from our mundane goings of the week, and instead travel to a spiritual time and space which the rabbis tell us is a “taste of paradise.”

A meaningful and weekly embrace of the Sabbath prompts Jews to celebrate their Jewishness, and reconnect to their spirituality.

According to Genesis, God created our universe in six days and on the 7th day, God rested.

We Jews believe that the Sabbath is God’s way of effectively recharging ourselves spiritually so that we can be even more effective as Jews and human beings during the other six days of the week.

For those who weekly experience Sabbath observance in a meaningful way; we can testify to how our keeping of Shabbat helps to assure the continued treasuring of our Jewish religious and communal lives.

In today’s modern, all too secular world, perhaps we have never needed our Sabbath observance more than we do now.

Rev. Dr. Heather Wright’s Take on Sabbath Practice:

It was in 1999 that I attended a course on “Sabbath-keeping” in my doctoral program in San Francisco Theological Seminary.

One of my favorite books from the course was by a Jewish theologian, Abraham Heschel, named appropriately, *The Sabbath*.

I was fascinated and drawn to the practice of setting aside a day, or 24-hour period, to cease from my labor and to “make space for God.”

I was drawn to it because at the time I was a doctoral student, taught full-time at a seminary I had helped found with a group of faculty, and had a private practice.

I didn’t have a lot of space in my life.

At first, trying to honor the Sabbath in my life wasn’t easy.

In his book *Addiction and Grace*, Gerald May said, “all of us crave time and space but when we find it, we fill it up quickly because we are afraid of spaciousness... unable simply to be in openness, receptive to the movement of the Spirit.”

However, over time, I found I was rejuvenated and had my batteries recharged by taking a day to not answer emails, review the to do list or schedule, put the cell phone aside, in order to focus on the people in my life, go to church, remember to breathe and pray.

My family was more relaxed as well.

Prayer can be entering into Sabbath rest, receiving the gift of peace, shalom, time set apart, and wholeness that God invites us to in the pages of Scripture and using them to discover God in our busy lives.

In that sense, resting in God is a form of fasting, fasting from our busyness, of what is habitual, whether it is email, TV, food, phone... Fasting is a form of self-emptying, creating space.

How much space do you have in your life?

Might this practice restore your batteries as well?

We invite you to try it for yourself.