



# SHABBAT

## UNPLUGGING & RECONNECTING



## Setting the Stage

## The Senator and the Sabbath:

Joe Lieberman on his Relationship With Sabbath

**I**t's Friday night, raining one of those torrential downpours that we get in Washington D.C., and I am walking from the Capitol to my home in Georgetown, getting absolutely soaked. A United States Capitol policeman is at my side, as we make our way up Peninsula Avenue from the Capitol building toward our distant goal, a four-and-a-half mile walk. Before leaving my Senate office I changed into sneakers, but now they are full of water.

As we slosh forward, a Capitol police car travels alongside for extra security at a stately pace. But I do not - indeed I cannot accept a ride in the car.

...Why am I walking instead of riding on a rainy night? Because it's Friday night, the Sabbath, the day of rest when observant Jews like me do not ride in cars. That would violate the letter and spirit of the Sabbath laws as the Bible and Jewish rabbinical opinions make clear. Normally I get home from my work in time for the start of the Sabbath-Shabbat in Hebrew, or Shabbos in Yiddish - at Sundown on Friday. But on this occasion, important votes on the budget of the United States kept me from doing so....

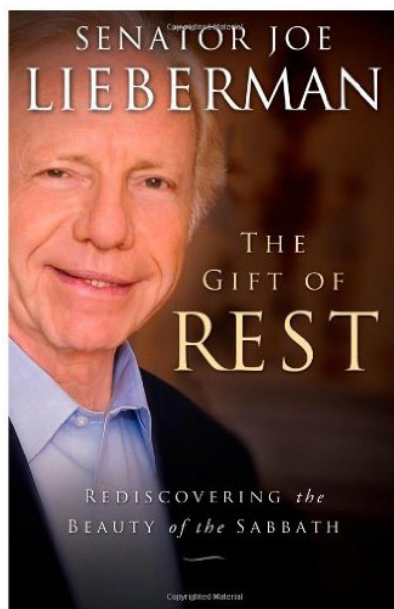
At that moment, I must admit, I looked to the heavens from which rain continued to pour and asked, half in humor and half in sincerity, "Dear God. Is this really what you want me to be doing to remember and honor the Sabbath?"

That's not a question I often feel compelled to ask. Observing the Sabbath is a commandment I have

embraced, the fourth commandment to be exact, which Moses received from God on Mt. Sinai. Most of the time, it feels like a commandment and more like a gift from God. It is a gift I received from my parents who, in turn, received it from their parents, who received it from generations of Jews before them in a line of transmission that goes back to Moses.

For me, Sabbath observance is a gift because it is one of the deepest, purest pleasures in my life... it engages the sense - sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch-with beautiful settings, soaring melodies, wonderful food and wine, and lots of love. It is a time to reconnect with family and friends-and, of course, with God, the Creator of everything we have time to "sense" on the Sabbath. Sabbath observance is a gift that has anchored, shaped, and inspired my life.

So, you might ask, if it's such a gift and pleasure, why not just get in the car with the policeman and take an easy, eagerly offered ride home? ...



“*For me, Sabbath observance is a gift because it is one of the deepest, purest pleasures in my life.*”

The Sabbath is an old but beautiful idea that, in our frantically harried and meaning-starved culture, cries out to be rediscovered and enjoyed by people of all faiths. It takes the form it does-its laws and customs-because from ancient days, generations of rabbis and sages have been transmitting, refining, and elaborating traditions that define Sabbath observance. These traditions build fences-like not

riding in a car-around the Sabbath to protect it as a day of faith and rest.

The Sabbath is an organic entity reflecting centuries of thought and experience. It is not an arbitrary contrivance...I constantly seek the wisdom of

Sabbath practices, and I'm rarely disappointed by what I find. If the cost is an occasional inconvenience or discomfort-like getting soaked on the walk home from the Capitol-I consider that a small price to pay for all the Sabbath gives and teaches me.

## Questions to Consider

- ▶ Have you ever felt like Sabbath was a commandment? A gift? What made you feel these ways?
- ▶ Have you ever had to sacrifice in order to rest?
- ▶ What would your impression of Senator Joe Lieberman be if you saw him walking home in the rain on Sabbath?

## ENGAGING THE TEXT

## Rest Is Not Just The Cessation Of Work: It's A Creation

### בראשית פרק ב

א ויכלו השמים והארץ, וכל-צבאם.

ב ויכל אלהים ביום השביעי, מלאכתו אשר עשה; וישבת ביום השביעי, מכל-מלאכתו אשר עשה.

ג ויברך אלהים את-יום השביעי, ויקדש אתו: כי בו שבת מכל-מלאכתו, אשר-ברא אלהים לעשות.

### Genesis: Chapter 2

- 1 And the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.
- 2 And on the seventh day God finished His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.
- 3 And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it; because that in it He rested from all His work which God in creating had made.

## Questions to Consider

- ▶ God created the world in six days, then He was already finished creating by the seventh. The expression that God "finished all the work that He had done" on the seventh day seems to imply that there was an additional creation on that day as well. What was created on the seventh day?

## רש"י שם

מה היה העולם חסר? מנוחה, באת שבת באת מנוחה, כלתה ונגמרה המלאכה.

### **Rashi, ibid.**

What did the world lack [on the seventh day]? Menuchah [simply translated as “relaxation”]. When Shabbat came, menuchah came; the work [of Creation] was completed and finished.

## מכתב מאליהו ב': דף יג

שבריא את יום השבת עצמו היא גמר מעשה בראשית. השבת היא בריאה בפני עצמה – מן הגשמיות. מנוחה-הנפש הזאת היא עצם חיי הרוחניות, והיא ההשתלמות לקראת עולם המנוחה. אין המכוון למנוחה עצלנית, מתה, שהיא כליון, אלא למנוחה גילוי השכינה בעולם הזה, זוהי שלימות הבריאה.

### **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol. II, p. 13**

#### **Menuchah gives the world the means of reaching the Divine.**

The creation of the Sabbath day itself was the completion of the entire Creation. Shabbat is a creation within itself, a world of menuchah. Menuchah does not refer to laziness, which is in reality a form of destructiveness and death. Rather, menuchah is a break from material, physical existence. It is a spiritual restfulness and peace ... which is a precondition to achieving the revelation of the Divine in this world. This itself is the completion of Creation.

### **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: Radical Then, Radical Now, p. 130**

#### **Rest as a spiritually creative endeavor is a uniquely Jewish phenomenon**

The Sabbath was a totally new institution in human history and at first no else could understand it ... What was it that they could not understand? Every religion had its holy days. But none before had ever had a day whose holiness was expressed in the prohibition of work. Greek and Roman writers ridiculed the Jews because of this. They were, said Seneca, Plutarch, and Tacitus, a lazy people who took a day off because they did not labor. Neither Greeks nor Romans could understand the idea that rest is an achievement, that the Sabbath is Judaism's stillness at the heart of a turning world, and that it was this that God had created on the seventh day.


**Q**uestions  
to Consider

- ▶ How can rest be a creation? Isn't it just the cessation of work?
- ▶ In your own life what is the function of rests and breaks you take after work?
- ▶ How is the rest of Shabbos unique?

**ENGAGING THE TEXT**
**Rest Requires Preparation**
**בראשית פרק יא**

ב איזה הוא כבוד--זה שאמרו חכמים שמצוה על אדם לרחץ פניו ידיו ורגליו בתמין בערב שבת, מפני כבוד השבת. ומתעטף בציצית ויושב בכבוד ראש, מיתל לתקבלת פני השבת, כמו שהוא יוצא לקראת המלך. וחכמים הראשונים היו מקבצין תלמידיהן בערב שבת, ומתעטפים; ואומרים, בואו ונצא לקראת שבת המלך.

ג ומכבוד השבת, שילבש כסות נקייה. ולא יהיה מלבוש החל, כמלבוש השבת.

**Rambam (Maimonides): Laws of Shabbos: Chapter 30**

What is considered honoring the Sabbath? That's which our Rabbis have said that a person is commanded to wash his face, hands, and feet with warm water before the Sabbath in order to honor Sabbath. He should wrap himself in tzitzis and wait with excited anticipation to accept the sanctity of Sabbath, as one would greet a King. And Rabbis of previous generations would gather their students before Sabbath and go out and proclaim, "Let us go and great the Sabbath king."

And part of honoring the Sabbath is wearing special beautiful clothing, unlike that which is worn the rest of the week.


**Q**uestions  
to Consider

- ▶ Why is preparation an integral part of rest?
- ▶ What other ways would you consider preparing for Sabbath?

### שמות פרק לה:ב

ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה וביום השביעי יהיה לכם קדש שבת שבתון לה'.

#### **Exodus 35:2**

Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day, a Sabbath of solemn rest to the LORD.

### תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף מט עמוד ב

ארבעים חסר אחת כנגד מי? אמר להו רבי חנינא בר חמא: כנגד עבודות המשכן הא דתנן אבות מלאכות.

#### **Talmud Shabbos 49b**

What do the 39 categories of work we abstain from on Shabbos correspond to? Said Rabbi Chaninah bar Chama: They correspond to the work which was required to build the Temple.

### רש"י שם

כנגד עבודות המשכן - אותן המנויות שם בפרק כלל גדול היו צריכין למשכן, ופרשת שבת נסמכה לפרשת מלאכת המשכן ללמוד הימנה.

#### **Rashi, ibid.**

“They correspond to the building of the Temple,” meaning those categories of work that the Rabbis enumerate in the Mishnah were all required in order to build the Temple. And it is for this reason that in the Torah the chapter that discusses the laws of Sabbath is juxtaposed to the chapter that discusses the building of the Temple.

## Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Sabbath

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.

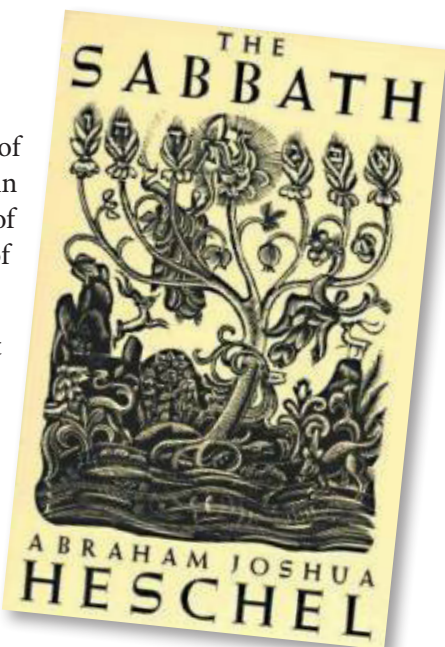
Jewish ritual may be characterized as the art of significant forms in time, as architecture of time. Most of its observances--the Sabbath, the New Moon, the festivals, the Sabbatical and the Jubilee year--depend on a certain hour of the day or season of the year. It is, for example, the evening, morning, 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.



“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.”

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.

...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.

 **Q**uestions  
to Consider

- ▶ Can you think of any other ways that the Sabbath and the Temple are connected?
- ▶ What does the “holiness of time” mean to you?