

Preparation for G154 — Keeping Sabbath

“Does it sometimes feel as if your entire life is like an endless round of work and frantic consumption and leisure that feels suspiciously like work? Is true, healing rest something you are vaguely planning to enjoy...one day?”

The Sabbath comes to us from the Jewish tradition. In the story of creation in Genesis, each of God's six acts of creation is like an act in a play. And the climax is: God rests. Why would God have thought it so important to rest? Rabbi Elijah of Vilna said that God stopped to show us that what we create becomes meaningful to us only when we stop creating it and start to think about why we did so.

We have eliminated the blue laws that restricted the range of things you could do on a Sunday. Now we can work, shop, and engage in all kinds of organized recreation, twenty-four seven. So we don't stop to rest. We don't stop to think about the meaning of what we have created. We don't stop to consider ourselves and our place in the universe. Judith Shulevitz writes that ‘the Sabbath, the one day in seven dedicated to rest by divine command, has become the holiday Americans are most likely never to take.’”

1. What is your current concept of the Sabbath? How does it relate to your upbringing? Did you know that some traditions emphasize the joyful nature of Sabbath, as opposed to obligations or denial? “The holiness of the Sabbath is made manifest in the joy people expect to experience on that day... Taking a walk, resting, making love, sharing meals, talking with loved ones, reading—these are good too.” Have you ever experienced this view of Sabbath?
2. The Sabbath isn't just about eliminating work or other busy-ness; it's about making space in your life for reflection and for things you may not be able to experience during the rest of the week. If you made that space, what would be rejuvenating activities that you could experience on a Sabbath? What would you reflect on? How might your outlook or your life change if you kept Sabbath regularly? “One day to remember who we really are and what is really important. One day that, week after week, anchors a way of life that makes a difference every day.”
3. **Is** coming to church an element of your Sabbath experience? What is the value of keeping Sabbath in community? “None of us should think that we can sustain Sabbath keeping all by ourselves. We need to help one another discover this gift. Joining a congregation in ritual and worship will remind us that Sabbath keeping is not about taking a day off but about being recalled to our knowledge of and gratitude for our lives and our world. In addition, the friends with whom we worship can help us learn to rest and rejoice once the service is over.”
4. If you could create a more meaningful Sabbath ritual for yourself and your family, what would that look like? What steps would be needed to make it happen? And how could you protect that time and ritual in order to make it a permanent part of your life?
5. Have you ever thought about the broader issues of Sabbath keeping—refraining from work and commerce (which creates yet more work)—i.e., the possible benefits it might have on society or the environment if Sabbath became a more common practice? “The planet needs a rest from human plucking and burning and buying and selling. Refraining from work on a regular basis is a way of setting limits on behavior that is perilous for both human welfare and the welfare of the earth.”

Resources

The following quotes and ideas are liberally adapted from

- [Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People](#) by Dorothy C. Bass
- [UU World: The Magazine of the Unitarian Universalist Association](#), Sep/Oct 2003 “Relax: The discipline” by Aikman, Rev Amanda.