

The Sabbath

I chose to experience the Sabbath. This traditional day of rest for the followers of Judaism is observed on the seventh day of the Jewish week, starting a few minutes before sunset on Friday until three stars are seen on Saturday. This holy day is meant for prayer and to maintain your relationship with God. From researching Judaism, I have learned that according to the Torah, the Sabbath reflects a day of rest that symbolizes God resting after his great creation of the Heavens and Earth. The other reason for the Sabbath is celebrating the separation that the enslaved Hebrew people were able to make from the rulers of Egypt. So the Sabbath is a time to separate one's self from the "chains and constraints" of the workplace, including the tasks that need to be done in and around the home. This is a time to enjoy family and spend time with them, to bond and interact. Another central theme during the Sabbath is food, but more specifically meals shared together. Sitting down as a family and enjoying these meals is a time for reflection, a time to express gratitude to God. Some of the literature I've read claims that the Sabbath is the single most special day that Jews have. Apparently this claim is backed by the Torah scholars, describing the spiritual importance of this day. There is some debate on the prohibited or forbidden activities that are associated with the Sabbath. Depending on which discipline of Judaism one follows (Orthodox, Conservative, etc.) there are different interpretations of which activities or "categories" of activities should be avoided. One example of this is "lighting a fire" where some interpret the use of appliances as doing just that, due to a spark or electrical current that occurs when some appliances are used.

I began this Sabbath on Friday, concluding on Saturday. I ended the Sabbath when I could count the first three stars in the sky a little after sundown on Saturday evening. As my family will attest to, this was a very unique experience for me, as I don't ever slow down and "smell the roses" so to speak. So the first obstacle that I faced was to "allow" myself to take the weekend off. My normal routine is to mow the yard; clean the front and back yards, help with the laundry, cook on the grill or help in the kitchen, and maybe even wash the vehicles. I was raised in a traditional white, middle class neighborhood. My family structure and division of duties was also pretty "traditional" in that my father, my brother, and I were responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the yards and garage, as well as garbage removal and deposit in the dumpster for city collection. My mother and sister, on the other hand, took care of the laundry and the "indoor" cleaning responsibilities. This embedded sense of weekend duty has been with me throughout my life, and that is what made this Sabbath celebration a little uncomfortable. So the first order of business was to explain to my wife that I would not be engaging in any of the normal chores or activities that were part of our weekend rituals. I wanted to experience the true Sabbath without worrying about interpretation of banned activities, so I didn't do anything that would resemble "work."

Initially my mindset and thoughts were along the lines of "this is kind of a waste of precious and valuable time" as there are only a certain amount of hours in a weekend and there was so much that needed accomplishing. I then started thinking about why I felt so guilty about taking a break from the "working world." And the answer was because I'd become so conditioned to this way of life, chores needed to be done on the weekend because there was no other time during my hectic week to get them done. It wasn't "normal" for me to just sit around and do nothing. So I started to focus on what this assignment was really about and what the purpose of this was in the eyes of Judaism and the Jewish way of life. It wasn't about the work that still needed to be done; it was about taking a rest from the work that I had already accomplished earlier this week. I put in between 55-60 hours at the office during the prior five days and that was a significant block of time away from my family. I started thinking about the reason for the Sabbath; God "resting" after putting in six long days creating the Heavens and Earth. If God felt that a break was warranted after such a long week, I certainly could justify a rest as well. By no means did I accomplish anything close to the monumental feat that God did with his creation, but I began to understand the underlying lesson or principle. You must take time in your busy and chaotic business life to stop and enjoy the fruits of those labors. Life and time go by so quickly that I began to think of how much time away from my family that I have already lost due to work, school, or other activities. I then started to think about my religious beliefs and my spiritual health.

Since I read that cooking was one of the activities that were banned during the Sabbath, I made sure we had ready-to-eat foods that didn't require any cooking, baking, or preparation. I was surprised at the amount of time you have available when it's not spent preparing or cooking meals. That time could be better spent catching up with the events of the previous week, spending quality time with the children. This was another point of reflection for me; my kids had grown up so quickly. I wondered why I hadn't spent more weekends or at least part of weekends, just talking to them and enjoying their company. This college "assignment" has now become a profound awakening. Just gathering in the living room, exchanging small talk and relaxing together, was a pretty neat experience. I began to understand why the Sabbath was such a big part of Judaism, Jewish families celebrating and cherishing their time together. For some reason the horrific events of the Holocaust came to mind. Having to endure that dark and unforgettable period in their lives, the Jewish people remained strong and committed to their families and each other. If they could remain strong in their faith and their belief in God after suffering such pain and agony, that provided a strong foundation for their continued spirituality. So the

next part of the assignment was to make certain that I attempted to reflect on my spirituality while experiencing the Sabbath. I realized what a big part prayer and devotion to God are during the Sabbath. The main focus of this time is to follow God's command and make it a holy day.

The spirituality and self-reflection component of this assignment was the next task to consider. As this is a time for the Jewish people to center their families on prayer, I needed to try and gain an understanding of the importance and relevance of that process. At some point during the day, I found myself in deep meditation. I was thinking very hard about the concept of God creating the Heavens and Earth, and of Israel being the true Holy Land to which God will return the Jewish people. The enormous feat of what God had accomplished by creating the Heavens and Earth, I could not fathom. This feat was so miraculous that there could be no doubt that he was the Almighty right? And that thought led me to another piece of information I read while studying Judaism. The concept of good and evil - the Jewish faith makes it clear that judgment day will come for all of us. God will decide based on our behaviors and actions throughout our lives, what is to become of us. I can only hope that Heaven is as beautiful as we think it is. I would certainly hate to find out what the alternative is. So the afterlife will be the true reward, that's when our faith is going to be rewarded right? I do still have lingering questions but embrace what Judaism is trying to teach. For the Jewish people, the Sabbath experience reinforces what prayer and God's love are all about. In order to end up in heaven, you must understand how important this holy day of Sabbath is, and your prayers and spiritual lives must be very active and all-consuming. I was envisioning myself wearing a yarmulke and having the Star of David hanging in my kitchen. I was trying to live the entire Jewish experience so that I could understand their deep commitment and devotion to their faith.

Understanding that food and family meals during the Sabbath were a central part of the Sabbath, I made sure that we all sat together and talked. My family had developed another bad habit during these hectic, always in a hurry, something else to do, time in our lives. We didn't eat our meals together anymore. My children would come get their plates and then retire to their rooms or in front of the television. So other than Thanksgiving or Christmas dinners, nobody was used to this concept of eating at the same table. This was another aspect of this assignment that was a little out of my comfort zone. But surprisingly, after sitting down together and speaking of the day's events, we all found it to be a very positive experience. I explained to the kids that this type of activity is common in the Jewish communities and it creates strong family bonds and opens a dialogue about spirituality. So we had a conversation about the importance of family and continued the conversation throughout the meal. It was a great bonding opportunity, and we all realized that we needed to do this more often and not just when we "had" to. One of the interesting questions that came up was "I thought Sunday was the day that everyone rested and went to Church?" because both my wife and I were brought up on Christian teachings, the notion of Sunday being the day of worship and rest was the normal thought. I proceeded to explain to my children that not all religions have the same set of guiding principles or rules. And that it was possible to pray and connect with God and family on any day, it didn't just have to be a specific one.

I began to think about the amount of prayer that is "expected" or how much is normal during the Sabbath. Since I had only been exposed to saying prayers during church services, at holiday meals, or at bed time, I thought about these differences in prayer time. As there is obviously no minimum or required amount of prayer that will be measured, it made me wonder how much time during the Sabbath do the Jewish actually spend praying? Obviously everyone's different, and as such, the amounts of prayer will be different. I prayed, or meditated, or was in self-reflection, numerous times throughout this period. It was actually the most time I've spent in a spiritual role, and I was pleasantly surprised. I felt closer to my own faith and beliefs, as I felt like I was able to "connect" to the spiritual world and express my gratitude and feelings for God and the many blessings that have been bestowed on my family. This experience also teaches one that every faith must be considered and respected; my faith or my beliefs are not the only ones that matter. A lot of the teachings of Judaism make sense to me now.

I began thinking about being one of God's "servants" and deserving a day of rest. Did I deserve this? It definitely made me think about my own personal spirituality and my relationship with God. In order to be considered his servant, I need to make certain that I am serving the Lord. It made sense to me that I study God's word a little bit more in order to truly deserve the title of "servant." So it would make sense to me that this day of the Sabbath could be spent using some of the available time to read God's word. So this day was spent without the television being the center piece, or the cell phones, or the video games. It's amazing how much quality time you can find when you re-arrange your priorities. So this was a very enlightening experience, which I can honestly say I had never done. Spending the day actually resting for a purpose other than you're "tired" is a unique concept. Another important benefit to this day of rest is the physical and mental wellness. It has long been proven that lowering your stress level will absolutely increase your life expectancy. If you add four days a month of relaxation, this will quickly add up to almost 50 additional days a year of wellness. So there are multiple reasons why I could absolutely buy into the ritual of the Sabbath. I have been enhanced spiritually, physically, emotionally, and mentally through this assignment. I threw myself into this all the way; in return I was rewarded with a very positive experience.

Works Cited : Shabbat. (2011, August 31). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 19:47, September 4, 2011, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Shabbat&oldid=447661147>