

The Sabbath: A Day of Rest and Contemplation

I decided, for this essay, to attempt to keep the Sabbath during the Friday of August ---. Sabbath begins on sundown Friday and ends sundown Saturday. Preparation begins around 2 or 3 in the afternoon on Friday. There is usually a 45 minute synagogue service on Friday afternoon and the rest of the evening revolves around the blessing of the children and the Kiddush prayer. While I cannot attend a synagogue service I did read the Kiddush prayer. However, before I did this I went to the websites jewishvirtuallibrary.org and Judaism.about.com in order to get the outline of what Sabbath entails as well as a bit of history.

According to jewishvirtuallibrary.org the Sabbath ritual is the only one listed in the 10 commandments. Commandment Four states that one must “*Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. You have six days in which to do your work but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me. On that day no one is to work – neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country*” (Ex. 20: 8-10). Since God rested on the seventh day of creation, he created the Sabbath as a day to be made holy. According to jewishvirtuallibrary.org. there is no parallel in any other ancient civilization that has one day of the week as a day of rest. Furthermore, since God is the creator of all things, the idea of the Sabbath is also for Jews to remember that God brought them out of Egypt and that we are all essentially free.

After I grasped the importance of the days and the food and services involved I examined the restrictions that would be imposed upon me for the observance. The activities that are banned during the Sabbath are called *melachah* or “the kind of work that is creative, or that exercises control or dominion over your environment” (jewishvirtuallibrary.com). There are essentially 39 categories of activities that are banned. Rather than list them, the website summarized them as all of the types of work “that were needed to build a sanctuary.” Since building a sanctuary is not normally on my list of activities I was fairly sure that I would be all right during this ritual. However, I could not use electricity, travel, or get in a car. Those proved particularly difficult, so I had my wife turn on and off lights on Friday night (I figured I would let the refrigerator light be an exception). Friday evening was not too much of a problem. I did some reading, watched the sunset, and went to bed. I did not watch any television or use a phone, which was relatively easy for the short amount of time on Friday. I did not try to prepare Jewish foods, but I am not the cook in the house.

I did notice that this last part of the day was particularly quiet and peaceful. I did not feel rushed or pressed by any urgent matters. I was able to disconnect. In thinking back to Sabbath around 500 or 400 B.C., it must have been a time of greater reflection and perhaps an opportunity for greater self-awareness. Perhaps, the Sabbath was a chance for individuals to think about their relationship with God and their fellow men. Reading was probably not an option as there were not many books around and those that were, were probably controlled by more wealthy individuals. However, I can see that the Sabbath would be very family-centered and would allow parents to talk and teach their children and share stories of their work week or religious themed stories. It was probably a quiet time in the household.

By morning I was really ready to think about the things that I could not do. No television, electronic devices, no traveling or shopping were the day's restrictions. These restrictions were not much of a problem. I used the morning to read the class assignments for Religion 402 and 464, which involved reading the Bible passages, and reading other related religious materials. I did not write anything down as that is not permitted. I found my concentration to be a bit sharper than in the past, and I talked more with my wife and the grown kids who came over for a visit later in the morning. I did not attend a Jewish service, which normally lasts from nine o'clock in the morning to twelve noon on Saturday at the synagogue, so I used that time to read, study, and chat with family. I also napped and went for an early morning walk. According to the website Judaism.about.com most families will use Saturday after synagogue to play board games, discuss school or family activities, or do an outside activity. I have to admit I did not find the Saturday activities too difficult, though I do use Saturday to watch some golf or college sports, but thinking about the Sabbath and practicing a portion of it was not an imposition. My Saturdays are usually quiet, after the running of errands which were not done on this particular Saturday. The Sabbath ends when 3 stars in the sky are visible, or roughly 40 minutes after sunset. I actually went out just before sunset and did the star count, which was kind of enjoyable as I have a nice comfortable hanging chair outdoors in which I normally sit.

Overall, the Sabbath is a chance to unplug, talk with family and friends and build stronger bonds. If one is religious it does give one the ability to contemplate the universe, God and one's place in it. One can think of it as a spiritual exercise. I saw it as more of a chance for contemplation, and one can see how reading from the Torah or telling stories as a family unit strengthens not only the bonds of family, but also faith if other extended family members are included. It's definitely a more personal and spiritual contemplation that occurs during the Sabbath. I am sure that the

services both Friday and Saturday night impress upon congregants the importance of being a Jew, the institution of the synagogue, and the importance of the service. While I did not have the service, meals, and prayers, I can see how this day reinforces Judaism for its participants, their uniqueness, and their specialness in terms of their relationship with God. I was doing something very different from everyone else and I knew it. I was cognizant of the fact that I was a bit more special and different during those two days.

Works Cited

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