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בית המדרש ע"ש זיגלר

# Walking with the Jewish Calendar

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דרכיה דרכי נעם

# SHABBAT AND THE POSSIBILITY OF TRANSFORMATION

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## INTRODUCTION

How do we live in a world that seems to make a mockery of our deepest held beliefs and our tradition's most profound claims?

The first and most foundational claim that Judaism makes about the human beings is that we are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in God's image. Our tradition teaches that this means that every person, by virtue of being born, has innate dignity and worth. It teaches that every single human life is precious and that each person is endowed by God with unique qualities that will never be replicated in precisely the same way in another; that the differences between us are a reflection of God's love and God's greatness, and we should work to cultivate rather than suppress them.

And yet, the reality of our world seems to deny the truth of these claims. Judaism is rooted in an understanding of God and humanity that fundamentally rejects the degradation, exploitation, and diminution of human spirit that is characteristic of human society. Millions die of hunger and treatable diseases every year. War, hatred, prejudice, terror – all of these are about denying the sanctity and worth of human life. This leaves Jews with a great dilemma: do we disengage from a reality that seems to make a joke of our core principles, or do we abandon core principles that seem naïve, impossible and fantastic?

“Living with a dream,” writes Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, “is treacherous business. The dream gives and the dream takes away. Dreams can brighten an oppressive reality, or they can make the everyday appear drab and repellent. Dreams can give life purpose or rob it of value and meaning. Dealing with this double edge has been a major challenge for the Jewish people on their great trek through history toward redemption... Without the dream it hardly seems worth living... With it, everyday unredeemed life hardly seems worth living at all.”

So Torah offers us an eternal prescription, a holy formula that will make it possible for us to engage, live and work in the world as it is, but also to remember to dream about the world as it could be. *Six days a week you will engage and do all of your work, but the seventh day will be a Sabbath – a day for God.*<sup>1</sup> Built into the Jewish consciousness is a way to live with what is and simultaneously reject its limitations. Greenberg continues:

Paradoxically, Judaism affirms both the dream and the reality, both the perfect, redeemed world to be brought into being by human effort and the imperfect, unredeemed world of today...

Greenberg's stunning interpretation of Shabbat places the Jewish people as a timeless voice of dissent against the status quo, ever seeking to allow people to experience and enjoy the world as it is, while still voicing critique, through a weekly rhythmic vision of perfection, Shabbat. He ends his vision by declaring:

Through total immersion in the Shabbat experience, Jews live the dream [of an alternative, more perfect reality] *now*. By an act of [sheer] will, the community creates sacred time and space.<sup>2</sup>

Shabbat is so much more than a day of rest. It is a day of reconnecting with our deepest dreams for our world and our own lives. Shabbat becomes the holy time that saves us from falling into despair when everything seems to be crumbling beneath us, when the light in our lives seems to be eclipsed in darkness. It comes to remind us that love will ultimately triumph over loneliness, understanding over violence, dignity over degradation. Through praying, singing, talking, walking, dreaming, and sleeping we fortify the part of ourselves that knows that things can be better; we reawaken the part of ourselves that may have forgotten that we are more than our work, our conflicts, our fears, or our inbox.

In Kiddush, the blessing sanctifying Shabbat which is said over wine every Friday night, we evoke the memory of the Exodus from Egypt. What does Egypt have to do with our celebration of Shabbat? The Rabbis knew that it was not

<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:8-11.

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way*, 128



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enough to reaffirm to the great redemptive vision that grew out of the experience of leaving Egypt only once a year, at Passover. Instead, we need to remind ourselves of the possibility of freedom and transformation – personal and national – *constantly*. And especially on Shabbat. But that exercise in memory must never be only for its own sake. In the words of the Slonimer Rebbe, a great 20th century Hassidic teacher:

Every Shabbat has the power to bring redemption to the world. And this is why the commandment is written, “*Keep the Shabbat, and sanctify it. And you must remember, because you were a slave in Egypt*” – it is incumbent upon every Jew to remember and truly know [the experience of the liberation from slavery], because it is on Shabbat that the possibility of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, (the liberation of those enslaved) is renewed. And this is not exclusively for the sake of memory, rather it is for the sake of actually doing the work of Shabbat. A Jew must rise up from a place of degradation, a devastating situation, and find within herself ultimate freedom. And as our teacher taught: the essence of Shabbat is the memory of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* because it is upon every Jew to remember that *it is her life’s work* to leave Egypt, and with the strength of the holy Shabbat, to bring redemption to the world.<sup>3</sup>

Shabbat then is not just about affirming that things can be different. Shabbat actually has redemptive power – a power that can shape our experience of the world and help turn the tide of human history – because it leaves us with a mandate to *live differently* in the coming week than we did in the past; to see our personal liberation from exhaustion, overwork, anxiety, despair as a microcosm for the liberation of the Jewish people and *all people*; to see each week as an opportunity to elevate our reality to reflect a bit more of what ought to be.

Week after week, year after year, century after century, the Jewish people walk through history with this charge: things can be better. They *must be* better. Do not forget the great dreams our people have carried, encoded in our rituals and our traditions, for thousands of years. Now go – and become agents of the change you want to see.

## LIVING THE DREAM – A TRADITIONAL JEWISH RECIPE

One of the great treasures that Judaism offers the world is the constant struggle to capture beautiful and deep ideas and transform them into meaningful practice. Shabbat is a paradigmatic example of this phenomenon, both harnessing the awe and joy of its dream for a different tomorrow, and simultaneously directing a path for living out its ideals in the moment, communally and individually. Now that we recognize the significance of the dream, how do we create the time and space to foster such an experience?

The Kabbalat Shabbat liturgy famously reminds us that ideas and actions are inextricably entwined. We sing together in the famous piyyut (liturgical poem) LKha Dodi (Come My Beloved): “*Shamor Ve-Zachor B’Dibbur Echad*” (“Keep and Remember were uttered as one”).

In the Tanakh’s two renditions of the 10 commandments<sup>4</sup> the verses on Shabbat differ. In one (that appearing in Deuteronomy) the commandment is introduced by the word “*Shamor*” (“Keep”), while in the other the verb used is “*Zachor*” (“Remember”). Our rabbinic tradition understands these to be a simultaneous expression of the ways in which we are to live the vision of Shabbat expressed above. “Remembering” and “Keeping” Shabbat become the legal guidelines by which we may achieve our Shabbat ideal.

The Rambam (1135-1204) conveniently categorizes the obligations of Shabbat as follows:

“There are four components to the observance of Shabbat, two from the Torah and two from the Sages, derived from the Prophets. From the Torah: Remember and Keep. And from the Prophets: Honor and Delight. As it is written in Isaiah 58:13, ‘And you shall call the Shabbat a delight, sanctified to God and honored.’”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Netivot Shalom*

<sup>4</sup> *Exodus 20:8 and Deuteronomy 5:12*

<sup>5</sup> *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Shabbat, 30:1*



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Let us, therefore, explore these *halakhic* (legal) categories and some of the major the practices therein; the tools that spiritually mark and manage our Shabbat experience.

## ZAKHOR ET YOM HA-SHABBAT – REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY AND THE POSITIVE COMMANDMENTS

In Exodus 20:8, the Torah famously teaches us to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy, *Zakhor et Yom HaShabbat L’Kodsho*. This positive obligation (*mitzvat aseh*) has been debated by rabbinic scholars because of the ambiguity of the directive “to remember”. Is this something that can be actively pursued? Two major streams of interpretation have attempted to concretize this seemingly benign directive.

The 11th century luminary, Rashi,<sup>6</sup> understands the unique form the verb *zakhor* to intimate that this mitzvah is an expression of an ongoing action, it is something that exists *all of the time*. According to Rashi, “Pay attention to always remember the Sabbath day so that if you chance upon a beautiful thing, you shall prepare it for the Sabbath.” Read in this light, remembering Shabbat is an obligation that occurs not only on the day itself, but on all days. Every moment becomes an opportunity to actively acknowledge that, not too far away, there is a sacred space and holy time that begs special attention. By capturing these moments and actualizing them, even before Shabbat, we are fulfilling this obligation to acknowledge the potential for holiness in everything.

The Rambam understands this verse differently. He teaches:

It is a positive commandment from the Torah to sanctify the Shabbat day with a verbal statement, for it is written: “Remember the Shabbat day *to sanctify it* (Ex. 20:8)”. That is to say, remember it with words of praise and sanctification. The remembrance is done at the day’s entrance and exit: at its entrance with Kiddush and at its exit with Havdalah.<sup>7</sup>

According to this interpretation, the obligation “to remember” exists specifically on Shabbat – at its onset and conclusion – with a verbal statement of sanctification. *A first step to actualizing the dream is verbally marking it as Holy.*

This familiar practice is the centerpiece of the Shabbat evening ritual, the Kiddush. It is the verbal recognition that we have entered sacred time and space. In fact, a common misconception about the Shabbat Kiddush is that it is simply a blessing over wine. In actuality, it is time itself that we are blessing.<sup>8</sup> In fact, by specifically mentioning the redemptive communal moment of the Exodus from Egypt (see above), we render time “timeless”. We sanctify all time. The wine (or grape juice) is but the vehicle we use to add joy and sweetness to this moment.

## KAVOD AND ONEG – HONOR AND DELIGHT

The active and positive “doing” of Shabbat extends far beyond sanctifying the day in words and thought. Just as Rambam spoke of two prophetic categories of Shabbat Law, Honor and Delight – both extensions, in a way, of *Zakhor Et Yom Ha-Shabbat L’Kodsho* (remembering the Sabbath day to sanctify it) – so the rabbinic tradition extends the category of “honoring” Shabbat to include bathing and shaving before Shabbat and wearing special, distinct, clean clothing on Shabbat itself.

In a similar manner, we honor Shabbat through thoughtful and careful preparation for a day of beauty and tranquility, by bringing out our fancy tableware, white linens, and decorating the table with flowers. In this way we express not only the positive obligation to honor Shabbat, but also the dream of living in a world where this kind of beauty can extend beyond our own table.

<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, 1040 – 1105, France. See his commentary to Exodus, 20:8.

<sup>7</sup> *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Shabbat, 5:1-2*

<sup>8</sup> *The closing words of the Kiddush are: Blessed are You, God, who Sanctifies Shabbat. (MeKadesh Ha-Shabbat)*



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Of course, this doesn't mean becoming gaudy. Rather, it implies that the intention with which we choose to look and present ourselves and our belongings as we enter Shabbat should be a direct expression of our vision of Shabbat.

So, too, the positive obligation to “delight” in Shabbat. This injunction implores us to not only prepare thoughtfully for Shabbat, but to enjoy the day as well. By kindling flames as Shabbat arrives we create a space filled with light, a space that allows us to enjoy the communal experience of a Shabbat meal and the company of others. We are enjoined to pleasure in tasty food and drink<sup>9</sup> to the best of our abilities. And yes, the famous double mitzvah of Shabbat, sex, is included in this category.<sup>10</sup>

The positive doing of Shabbat, as we have seen, includes sanctifying the day, remembering the day, honoring the day, and delighting in it. In these ways we affirm our active involvement in the mandate to experience immediately what it can mean to live *differently* in the coming week.

## SHAMOR ET YOM HA-SHABBAT - KEEPING THE SABBATH DAY – THE NEGATIVE COMMANDMENTS

Perhaps the most challenging aspects of living Shabbat fall within the category of obligations associated with “*Shamor*,” the “don't do's” of Shabbat. In the second chapter of the Torah we read:

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed God's work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.<sup>11</sup>

After God completed creation, God rested. So, it follows, we, too, should rest on the seventh day of every week, just as God did.<sup>12</sup>

But this is only the beginning. Resting from work is hardly a clear-cut definition of what it is we are supposed to refrain from doing on Shabbat. What kind of work? Strenuous? Intellectually challenging? Does it depend on the ways in which we live during the week?

Within these questions themselves is embedded a major misperception about the prohibitions associated with Shabbat. The “work” we are not allowed to perform is not really work at all – at least not in the way we conventionally define it today. Rather, it is *malechet machshevet*, intentional/thoughtful creative activities, that are prohibited.

A somewhat exhaustive and very substantial list appears in the second mishnah of the seventh chapter of Tractate Shabbat. It offers us a list of 39 prohibited *melachot*, categories of creative work:

There are 39 primary categories of work [forbidden on the Sabbath]: seeding, plowing, reaping, gathering, threshing, winnowing, sorting, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, bleaching it, combing it, dyeing it, spinning it, mounting the warp of the loom, setting two heddles [in preparation to weaving], weaving two threads, unraveling two threads, tying a knot, untying a knot, sewing two stitches, tearing in preparation of sewing two stitches, trapping a deer, slaughtering it, skinning it, salting it & tanning its hide, smoothing [the hide], cutting the hide [into useful shapes], writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters, building, demolishing, extinguishing a flame, kindling a fire, striking the final blow (completing production of an object), transferring an object from domain to domain (public to private and vice-versa). These are the 39 primary categories of work.

<sup>9</sup> This explains why the two centerpiece of the Shabbat table rituals are wine and two loaves of challah. <sup>8</sup>By using our best and adding to what is regular; we are fully expressing our obligation to delight in the Sabbath.

<sup>10</sup> It is called a double mitzvah because we give ourselves the opportunity to fulfill both the commandment to delight in Shabbat and the obligation for those in sanctified relationships to “be fruitful and multiply.”

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 2:1-3

<sup>12</sup> See the second paragraph of this essay.



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What a list! Clearly not all of these *melachot* entail strenuous activity, yet all of them are biblically forbidden. This reiterates that what we are talking about is not just hard labor, but the very stuff that allows us to live in the world. Food, clothing, shelter, Torah – all of these are incorporated into this list.<sup>13</sup> On Shabbat, in order to walk in God's footsteps, we must refrain from engaging in the activities that permit us to partner with God and complete creation on a day-to-day basis. By doing this we are forced to contemplate the miraculous gifts we employ and to freshly understand the ways we can continue to use them to create a world worthy of partnership with God, a world that recognizes each person's dignity and inherent worth.

Rabbinically the term *melachot* gets translated as skilled work by a craftsman for creative (not destructive) purposes. Actions must possess three properties to be considered transgressive: Intention, improvement, and permanence.<sup>14</sup> The absence of one of these conditions does not necessarily render a given action permitted, rather it assigns it to the class of actions known as *toldot* (singular, *toldah*).<sup>15</sup> A *toldah* is an action that resembles a *malechet machshevet* in either its intended outcome or its method of performing it, and, for that reason, is also prohibited.<sup>16</sup>

The concept of *toldot* leads naturally to that of *sh'vut* or rest, a fitting concept with which to conclude our discussion of Shabbat. *Sh'vut* is a rabbinically instituted category of restrictions, created to safeguard the very principles that make Shabbat so powerful. These laws were adopted for two significant reasons:

- 1) To safeguard people from breaking the biblical infractions mentioned above and,
- 2) To protect Shabbat as a space in which people act *differently* than they do during the week.<sup>17</sup>

Through the introduction of the laws of *sh'vut* the rabbis essentially captured the essence of Shabbat: a day that looks and feels different from the grind of every other day. Alas, the outcome was, in the eyes of many, a seemingly endless list of onerous restrictions and obligations. Before we fall into the trap of thinking of the Shabbat laws in these terms, let us stop and think for a moment about what Shabbat would be without the space it provides to simply stop and reflect.

Throughout the week we are engaged, sometimes almost obsessively, in *malechet machshevet* – creative work – that often ends up defining who we are in the world to such an extent that we cease to see one another – or for that matter, even ourselves – except as a means to an end. We lose sight of humankind as a miraculous work of creation in and of itself. The vision of perfection with which we opened this essay speaks about a reality in which we enable ourselves to see one another as God intended us to be seen, as a vessel created in God's image. It forces us to interact with and conceptualize the world through a raw and unfiltered lens, as God must have on that very first Shabbat. What are we then left with? The freedom and courage to once again enter the world of the “mundane” week knowing that our experience of Shabbat brought with it a redemptive and timeless dream of what *can be*.

<sup>13</sup> Note, this is just one version of the derivation of the *melachot*. Others explain that it is directly related to building the Tabernacle and the creation of the garments and vessels needed to perform its holy work. (See B. Shabbat 49b)

<sup>14</sup> Intention – it must be thoughtful, not accidental. Improvement – the activity must have a positive effect. Permanent – The activity must leave a lasting imprint. Something done that leaves a temporary outcome is not in the category of *melechet machshevet*.

<sup>15</sup> Literally: derivative violation

<sup>16</sup> When one, by accident, performs one of the 39 forbidden *melachot* it becomes somewhat complicated. The rabbis classified all accidental *melachot* into the category of *grama*, indirect effect. Whether or not these actions are forbidden, after the fact, is sometimes related to one's ability to anticipate a possible transgression.

<sup>17</sup> What is referred to in Aramaic as: *Uv'din D'Chol*.



# SHABBAT – TEXT 1

## תלמוד בבלי שבת דף מט ע"ב

הדור יתבי וקמיבעיא להו: הא דתנן אבות מלאכות ארבעים חסר אחת פנגד מי? אָמר להו רבי חנינא בר חמא: פנגד עבודות המשפן. אָמר להו רבי יונתן ברבי אלעזר כך אָמר רבי שמעון ברבי יוסי בן לקוניא: פנגד מלאכה. מלאכתו ומלאכת שבתורה ארבעים חסר אחת.

### TALMUD BAVLI, TRACTATE SHABBAT 49B

They further went into session and raised this question: As to that which we have learned in the Mishnah, that the general categories of labor [prohibited on Shabbat] are forty-less-one: to what do they correspond? R. Hanina bar Hama answered them: They correspond to the classifications of labor in the construction of the tabernacle. R. Jonathan bar Eleazar said to them: This is what R. Simeon b. R. Yosé b. Laqonayya said: They correspond to the words “work,” “his work,” and “the work of,” which appear in the Torah thirty nine times.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- Haven't we always been taught that the 39 prohibited labors of Shabbat directly correspond to the tasks required to build the Tabernacle? This text presents that view, but also another. Which is correct, if any?
- Does this text make the number 39 feel arbitrary?
- Also, why is it referred to as 40 minus 1? What's wrong with 39?



## SHABBAT – TEXT 2

### שמות פרק לא

(א) וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (ב) רְאֵה קָרָאתִי בְשֵׁם בְּצַלְאֵל בֶּן-אוּרִי בֶן-חֹר לְמַטֵּה יהודה: (ג) וְאִמְלֵא אֶת־רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בְּחַכְמָה וּבְתַבּוּנָה וּבְדַעַת וּבְכָל-מְלָאכָה: (ד) לְחֹשֶׁב מְחַשְׁבֹת לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּזָהָב וּבַכֶּסֶף וּבַנְּחָשֶׁת: (ה) וּבְחֹרֶשֶׁת אֶבֶן לְמַלְאָכֵי אֶת־וּבְחֹרֶשֶׁת עֵץ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכָל-מְלָאכָה....

(יב) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (יג) וְאֵתָה דַבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אַךְ אֶת-שַׁבַּת־תִּי תִשְׁמְרוּ כִּי אֹתָהּ הוּא בְּיַמֵּי וּבְיָמֵיכֶם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם לְדַעַת כִּי אֲנִי ה' מְקַדְּשְׁכֶם: (יד) וְשִׁמְרֶתֶם אֶת-הַשַּׁבָּת כִּי קֹדֶשׁ הוּא לָכֶם מִחֻלְלֶיהָ מוֹת יוּמָת כִּי כָל-הֹעֵשֶׂה בָּהּ מְלָאכָה וְנִכְרְתָהּ הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מִקֶּרֶב עַמִּיהָ: (טו) שִׁשַּׁת יָמִים יַעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן קֹדֶשׁ לַה' כָּל-הֹעֵשֶׂה בָּהּ מְלָאכָה בַּיּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת מוֹת יוּמָת: (טז) וְשִׁמְרוּ בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-הַשַּׁבָּת לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם: (יז) בְּיַמֵּי וּבֵין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֹתָהּ הוּא לַעֲלֹם כִּי-שִׁשַּׁת יָמִים יַעֲשֶׂה ה' אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבַּת וַיִּנָּפֵשׁ:

### Exodus 31:1-17

Then the Lord said to Moses: See, I have specifically chosen Bezalel son of Uri, grandson of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have filled him with the divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of crafts; to make expert designs in with gold, silver, and bronze; to cut stones for setting and in carving wood – to work at every kind of craft ...

And the Lord said to Moses: Speak to the people of Israel: Be careful to keep my Sabbaths, for the Sabbath is a sign of the covenant between me and you from generation to generation. It is given so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy. You must keep the Sabbaths, for it is holy for you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; anyone who works on that day will be cut off from the community. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day must be a Sabbath day of complete rest, a holy day dedicated to the Lord. Anyone who works on the Sabbath must be put to death. The people of Israel must keep the Sabbath day by observing it from generation to generation. This is a covenant obligation for all time. It is a permanent sign of my covenant with the people of Israel. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day he stopped working and was refreshed.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- A popular rabbinic exegetical move, known as *smichut parshiyot* ("joined sections"), uses two closely occurring verses that seem to speak to different topics as a tool for interpreting either verse.
- How do you think these two passages which occur in a single chapter of the Torah inform one another? Look for key recurring words as clues.
- What is Bezalel's gift, exactly? How does it help inform our understanding of what is prohibited on Shabbat?
- If we were to develop the idea of expert work by making it more concrete in what directions might we take the idea?





## SHABBAT – TEXT 3

### טור אורח חיים הלכות שבת סימן רמב

גרסינן בפרק כל כתבי אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי יוסי כל המענג את השבת נותנין לו נחלה בלא מצרים ר"נ בר יצחק אמר אף ניצול משיעבוד מלכיות אמר רבי יהודה אמר רב כל המענג שבת נותנין לו משאלות לבו ואמר רבי חייא בר אבא אמר רבי יוחנן כל המשמר שבת כהלכתו אפילו עובד ע"ג כאנוש מוחלין לו רב יהודה אמר רבי אלמלי שמרו ישראל שבת ראשונה כהלכתה לא שלטה בהם וכו' אמר רב שימון בר יוכי אלמלי משמרים ישראל שתי שבתות מיד נגאלין.

### Tur, Orach Hayyim, Chapter 242

The chapter called Kol Kitvei [in Tractate Shabbat, 118a] teaches: Rabbi Yochanan taught in the name of Rabbi Yossi: All who delight in Shabbat will be rewarded with a limitless inheritance. Rabbi Nachman bar Yizchak taught that [the one who delights in Shabbat] would be spared from the servitude of foreign nations. Rabbi Yehuda taught in the name of Rav: Anyone who delights in Shabbat will receive the desires of her heart. And [furthermore], Rabbi Hiyya bar Abbe taught in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: Anyone who observes Shabbat according to its laws, even if this person is an idol worshipper like Enosh, forgiveness is granted. Rabbi Yehuda taught in the name of Rav: If only the people Israel would have observed the first Shabbat according to its laws, they would not have been ruled over by foreign peoples. Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai taught: If only the people Israel would observe two *Shabbatot*, they would immediately be redeemed.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- This happens to be R. Jacob b. Asher's (the Tur's) very first entry in his code of halachah on Shabbat. Why do you think he chose to quote this piece of Talmud?
- What is a limitless inheritance? Something physical? Spiritual? Emotional?
- It looks like the benefits which accrue from the observance of Shabbat override the penalties associated with idol worship – one of the three most abhorrent practices in the eyes of Jewish law. What is it about Shabbat that might allow an idol worshipper to achieve forgiveness?
- Does Shabbat function in a similar relationship to the more abstract “idols” of our own day? What are these idols and how is our relationship to them changed through Shabbat observance?



## SHABBAT – TEXT 4

### ERICH FROMM, *THE FORGOTTEN LANGUAGE*, p188

The Sabbath ritual has such a central place in the biblical religion because it is more than a “day of rest” in the modern sense; it is a symbol of salvation and freedom. This is also the meaning of God’s rest; this rest is not necessary for God because he is tired, but it expresses the idea that great as the Creator is, greater and crowning creation is peace; God’s work is condescension; he must really “rest”, not because he is tired but because he is free and fully God only when he has ceased to work. So is man fully man only when he does not work, when he is at peace with nature and his fellow man; that is why the Sabbath commandment is at one time motivated by God’s rest and at the other by liberation from Egypt. Both mean the same and interpret each other: “rest” is freedom.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- After reading this text, how would you define freedom? Freedom from something? Freedom for something? Activity? Rest?
- We have always learned that our tradition values work as much as rest. In fact, to rest, according to our tradition, we must rest from something. How do you reconcile that idea with this text?
- What do you think Fromm means by “peace”?
- Fromm illustrates his complex understanding of the freedom of Shabbat by juxtaposing God's rest from the work of creation with God's delivery of Israel from Egypt. What do each of these images stand for? How are they being used?



# SHABBAT – TEXT FOR GROUP STUDY

## RABBI IRVING GREENBERG, *THE JEWISH WAY*, p128

Paradoxically, Judaism affirms both the dream and the reality, both the perfect, redeemed world to be brought into being by human effort and the imperfect, unredeemed world of today...

The way to cope with this tension is to live dialectically – to accept the world, affirm its sanctity, participate in it fully, and enjoy it. At the same time, the divine ideal prods the people to fundamental criticism of society's status quo. By living in the world while at the same time offering a testimony of hope to redeem it, the Jews have become the prophets of permanent dissent, demanding a messianic perfection and insisting that it is not yet here. In the Rabbinic, halachic style, this permanent revolution moves in ceaseless steps toward justice, acting in the best way possible until the final goal is achieved.

The classic Jewish answer to our dilemma is to set up a rhythm of perfection. The first movement is to plunge into the worlds as a participant. Then, just when there may be a danger of complete absorption into this world, there is an alternate reality to enter into: the Shabbat. Stepping outside the here and now, the community creates a world of perfection. Through total immersion in the Shabbat experience, Jews live the dream *now*.

By an act of [sheer] will, the community creates sacred time and space.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

- **What is Greenberg proposing by saying we should live “dialectically”?**
- **In what ways and to what degree is Shabbat a critique of society's status quo?**
- **One normally associates revolution with action – indeed often violent action. Do you buy into Greenberg's idea that Shabbat is revolutionary? In what ways is/isn't this the case?**
- **Greenberg speaks of Shabbat as an act of “creat[ing] sacred time and space”. Does this agree with your understanding and/or experience of Shabbat? How so? Is there a problem in describing the central activity of Shabbat as one of creation?**





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