

The Sacred Time of Sabbath

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I lay in bed restlessly as the velvety darkness blanketed the earth, the shadows peeking through my window as objects slipped, invisible, into the darkness that enveloped them. Time passed, and passed, and passed as I lay anxious and agitated awaiting the sleep that evaded me. Time, in that moment, seemed to be my enemy as I fought against the ticking clock. And yet as time slowly passed my perspective began to change. I welcomed, not boredom and angst, but a pause, a moment to simply be – unique in the business of daily living; it served as an opportunity to welcome contemplative moments draped in a darkness that no longer remained a reminder of my elusive sleep but offered a moment to meditate below those countless stars that hovered far above me. The sky ultimately transitioned from pure black sprinkled with light to a beautiful array of oranges and pinks and reds, as I left my room and welcomed the emerging sun while sitting in the garden surrounded by tulips and daffodils and azaleas. There is something so sacred in that alluring transition from night to day that connected me to all that is, was, and ever will be, to all that I hold sacred and divine. That night was a contemplative blessing, a sacred, holy, unexpected, and hallowed time.

Today we reflect on the Sabbath – that sacred and hallowed time – through the insights of prominent Jewish theologian and philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel in his book *The Sabbath*. He begins by offering a reflection on the book of Genesis. Genesis 2:2-3 offers this, “And on the seventh day God finished the work that [God] had done, and [God] rested on the seventh day from all the work that [God] had done. So, God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that [God] had done in creation.”¹ As such, Heschel writes, “Three acts of God denoted the seventh day: [God] rested, [God] blessed, and [God] hallowed the seventh day.”² These are the seeds to the Sabbath. We use the word

¹ Genesis 2:2-3 New Revised Standard Version

² *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel pg. 14

“God” today because that is the language of the Jewish faith. I invite you to interpret this language in whatever way is true to you. In this faith, the Sabbath was denoted a sacred day, a holy day, a profound day, just as I had experienced. And what is of import here is of that day not resting in sacred space or object or anything tangible, but in sacred, blessed, and hallowed time, not things or buildings or objects, but contemplative moments; it became a unique invitation to greater, deeper relationship to all that is holy settling into intentionally created, contemplative, sacred time.

Sabbath is when, quote, “our spirit, our souls, soar to eternity, aspire to the holy.”³ Through contemplative pause and surrender to divinity, we work to achieve a life as sanctified, holy, and blessed as is possible in this mortal, finite realm. Even if distraught and prayer eludes us, even when our souls wither and we feel it in our bones, we can return to a practice of a sacred, silent pause to reconnect us to that which matters most.⁴ We aspire to the holy.

And in this aspirational time a seed of eternity is planted in the soul, waiting to be cultivated through all that is contemplative, sacred, and intentional. Through holy and blessed pause. We hold a seed, the potential, to connect with eternity which is so very sacred and holy. Just as we tend to the seeds of our gardens, so, too, do we water this seed and nurture it through Sabbath, cultivating and growing an understanding of eternity.⁵ Through our contemplation we enter a realm that invites us into an “awareness of what eternity is”⁶ – an insight into the unknowable. An understanding that helps us understand the elusive essence that is God eternal. We enter what is understood as this realm of “endless peace”⁷ while we settle within. We enter a dichotomy, quote, “not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord.”⁸

³ *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel pg. 75

⁴ *Ibid* pg. 101

⁵ *Ibid* pg. 13

⁶ *Ibid* pg. 101

⁷ *Ibid* pg. 101

⁸ *Ibid* pg. 3

I add this – each blessed being has some belief or inquiry about creation, something that began all that is and that slipped consciousness into the minds of all living beings. Some picture Genesis, that elusive garden of Adam and Eve. Some settle into the Big Bang – this profoundly and unimaginably massive universe birthed of but a tiny, hot, dense, point. Ultimately, we arrived. Sabbath does not welcome the result of creation – us, the trees, the stars. Sabbath invites us into the ongoing mystery of creation forever unfolding. Unfolding blessings and growth and developments and refinements – in our pause we welcome the profound, unknowable mystery. Practicing Sabbath is an opening to a continuously unfolding creation story.⁹

And I offer this, a question: what is the dichotomy between the six days of doing and the one day of being? Let us begin with another question: What is the state of the spirit when we are not practicing intentional, contemplative pause and rest? When we let that business and angst and anxiety of daily living slip into priority over care of the soul and the spirit and connection with the divine? That inner piece of us resides “alone, disregarded, forsaken, forgotten.”¹⁰ And yet the spirit is waiting in that forsaken, forgotten moment, waiting for us to welcome blessings and divinity back into our lives – healing ourselves with intentional, contemplative connection, rest, peace, and renewal. For six days we chase profit and wrestle with monotonous angst, the seventh day we connect with eternity¹¹ – that hallowed space within that connects us to an endless, timeless divinity.

I’ve heard of practicing the Sabbath as synonymous with building a palace within the spirit. It is a palace built and constructed “of soul, of joy and of reticence”¹² – a blessed chateau that remains, consistently, in our hearts of all that “heals, inspires, and celebrates.” A refuge of “Tranquility, serenity, peace and repose.”¹³ Sabbath is a time where our awareness of God and all that is sacred blossoms and grows, allowing us to overcome all that seeks to harm us, all that

⁹ *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel pg. 100

¹⁰ Ibid pg. 65

¹¹ Ibid pg. 13

¹² Ibid pg. 15

¹³ Ibid pg. 23

fear and anxiety that seeks to inundate us and intrude on our wellbeing. We offer calm, peace, and reprieve by constructing that blessed palace, intentionally. Contemplatively. When facing that hardship, seek out the palace of love and hope and peace and faith that you have built within.

Sabbath is both this worldly and otherworldly, and I offer this as but a brief reflection. It is a reminder of both the realm of the finite and the mortal, as well as the realm of both the infinite and the immortal; of what is here and present and real as well as all of that which is yet to come – that great, profound mystery. Sabbath welcomes the joy that is of this world, and Sabbath welcomes the holiness and rest of all that is yet to be, offering gifts as we both navigate what is and wonder of what is yet to be. Joy, holiness, and rest.¹⁴

To live a sacred life is to invite sacred moments. Beautiful moments of awe, wonder, insight, inspiration, and faith. It is not to amass information, but to relish in spiritual presence, the presence of the divine, however we may experience that. To live a sacred life is to welcome and cherish those moments akin to the one I had under the velvety night sky; that awe-filled transition to the day. To engage in those religious experiences is not retaining an attachment to the place of which it came to pass but connecting to that moment of divine and sacred insight. It is not a place, but time. One simple moment of spiritual insight is a fortune. To live a spiritual life is to lean into the sacredness of time both within and beyond, connecting us to the eternal and thus connecting us to all that is sacred and holy. Heschel offers, “Spiritual life begins to decay when we fail to sense the grandeur of what is eternal in time.” Spirituality is intimately connected to our understanding of the eternal, to grandeur and the profoundness of all that is, and a lack of this understanding strips us of faith.

I also want to reflect upon the relationship with all that is sacred during the Sabbath. “Where is God?” asks Heschel. “Where is divinity?” we ask. He argues against the idea that all that is sacred and holy is a presence in the universe or even a spirit immersed in nature, as I believe,

¹⁴ *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel pg.19

but, instead, simply – and profoundly – a spirit. Not affiliated with things, even trees or cascading waterfalls, but an eternal spirit, an unceasing, unknowable essence.¹⁵ Furthermore, what is paramount, and what we have touched upon already, is God as the blessed eternal. During this sacred time of Sabbath, of pause and renewal and contemplation and rest, we are at home with the divine – with this essence, this spirit. What is the relationship? During this hallowed time, we, quote, “aspire to approach the likeness of the divine.”¹⁶ We have this moment to become more divine ourselves, aiming to become more and more like that elusive, eternal, good and blessed essence. We disconnect from the ordinary and enter the realm of divinity and peace. And Heschel writes that the Sabbath also offers sacred and holy reciprocity, for our relationship with divinity is not one-sided, but an interaction of both God and being.¹⁷ On that morning among the tulips and the azaleas, the sacred entered me, and I entered the sacred. I offered awe, and divinity offered beauty. It was held as a blessed, hallowed time.

I invite you to take your own Sabbath, your own time under the velvety, black sky, sitting among the tulips as the sun peeks above the horizon. Not necessarily on the seventh day, but any day, any time. May you create that intentional time and space to pause, rest, and renew, aspiring to the holy and connecting to the eternal. I invite you to disconnect from the ordinary and connect, instead, with all that is beautiful, blessed, and beloved; to wonder and divinity. It is counter-cultural, yes. And it is so very important; I hope to have imparted that. Sabbath – that profoundly sacred time – is meant to be experienced by every blessed being in this mortal, finite, and earthly realm. So, bless yourselves with that pause, that intention, that renewal. You are a sacred and hallowed being. It takes effort and creativity to schedule a Sabbath, but it is needed as one connects to what is truly vital and important, a time that is both restorative and transformational.

¹⁵ *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel pg. 4

¹⁶ *Ibid* pg. 16

¹⁷ *Ibid* pg. 53

And so, beloveds, I am entering my own time of Sabbath, my own time to connect with mystery and divinity and the eternal and tend to my own heart and spirit and soul. It is such a blessing and an honor to serve as your minister. And it is time to take an intentional pause so I can settle in a sacred time of rest – a time of sabbath. I leave you next week for Sabbatical. This time away not only feeds my spirit but allows me to better serve each and every one of you upon my return. I hope to return with new insight as well as a deeper presence. I intend to connect with my spirit, my faith, my theology, my family as well as practices of self-care, study, and travel. While I am gone, you will continue to be held in the love and compassion of our beloved community, as well as by our anchor minister, who will provide worship and tend to any aching spirits in our midst while I am gone. You are blessed and beloved and always will be. During my time away you are offered the unique opportunity to hear a vast array of preachers, offering a wealth of theologies and insights and perspectives to expand your heart, mind, and spirit. You can explore more ways to remain in community together, and to live out our mission and vision while fostering and tending to your spirituality and faith. During these four months, I will be gone in body, but present in spirit. I hold each of you in my heart and in my prayers and will continue to do so.

So blessed be our sanctified time together this morning as we join as one to worship all that is unknowable and eternal. Blessed be our intentions to invite the infinite into our hearts, minds, and bodies, resting with the mystery of creation. Blessed be the pause, the sacred moment, an invitation to aspire to all that is divine and holy. Blessed be the time that is sacred, held above the monotony of all things tangible, as we connect with an essence that inhabits neither flower nor lightning bolt, but is, instead, all that is eternal and everlasting. Blessed be this moment, this morning, this day, and blessed be those moments of pause and contemplation yet to come. Connect to the holy, beloveds. Reside in all that is sacred and eternal.

May it be so, and Amen.