



A Wholehearted Sabbath

BY LAURA BOGLE, MINISTER, FOOTHILLS UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP, MARYVILLE, TENNESSEE

It was August 21st of last year when something out of the ordinary happened. Schools closed. People took off from work early, or even the whole day if they could. Some had parties, and gathered to play and eat and enjoy each other. Even those who had stayed at their desks or shops or factories or in their cars stepped outside at the same time, and for about two minutes looked up and focused their attention on something else—something beautiful; something much, much bigger than themselves.

And you didn't have to pay for it. Sure, you could pay for parking near a good spot, and I'm sure there were some t-shirts you could buy. But the total solar eclipse itself could not be commodified. (We have not yet figured out how to control the path of the sun and the moon for maximum profit.)

For that moment, I felt as if we had entered a different dimension. The light dimmed and the cicadas struck up their chorus in the middle of the day. We could see some stars that are normally hidden from us at 2:30 in the afternoon. Some people cheered. Others, like my children, became very, very quiet. The heavens that many of us don't pay much attention to suddenly became the focus of our excitement and awe and amazement.

And it didn't seem to matter your religious preference or your political orientation or your age or your race or your social status. We were all there together. I was so thankful to witness it—both what happened up above, and what happened down here. Why did it take something on this scale of magnitude—a total solar eclipse!—for this kind of stopping, just to be in awe.

I loved it so much, I wanted it for everyone. I thought about those locked away in prisons or stuck in jobs they could not leave, and some who could not or would not step outside and look towards the heavens for a moment of freedom.

The experience also made me think about other times and other cultures that respect a kind of rhythm of rest, a rhythm of gratitude and awe. A rhythm that many of us in this country have mostly left behind. A rhythm of Sabbath.

The great 20th century Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote in his 1951 book, *The Sabbath*: "There is a realm of time where the goal is 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." He's talking about the biblical 4th Commandment, to observe the Sabbath. It's a time to imitate God, to stop your work and appreciate gifts of creation.

In 2005 his daughter, Susannah Heschel, also a great scholar and theologian, wrote a new introduction to his book, in which she reflects on what observing the Sabbath was like growing up in their home:

When my father raised his Kiddush cup on Friday evenings, closed his eyes, and chanted the prayer sanctifying the wine, I always felt a rush of emotion. As he chanted with an old, sacred family melody, he blessed the wine and the Sabbath with his prayer, and I also felt he was blessing my life and that of everyone at the table. I treasured those moments....

My mother and I kindled the lights for the Sabbath, and all of a sudden I felt transformed, emotionally and even physically. After lighting the candles in the dining room, we would walk into the living room...facing west, and we would marvel at the sunset that soon arrived.

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The Sabbath is the link between the paradise which has passed away and the paradise which is yet to come.

—Andrew Wylie

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT SABBATH

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There, again, is a turning to the heavens and the gift of creation that we receive, no matter what; turning the ordinary—wine, candles, sunset—into the extraordinary during a special realm of time.

When and how do you enter a realm of time where the goal is simply to be, to give, to share; where your attention is tuned not to CNN or NPR or Facebook or Twitter or your to-do list or your fill-in-the-blank activity? But tuned instead to something much bigger and much smaller at the same time. Tuned to something like the sunset, something like a cricket sounding in the middle of all the noise.

American scholar and theologian Walter Brueggemann writes:

It is unfortunate that in U.S. society, largely out of a misunderstood Puritan heritage, Sabbath has gotten enmeshed in legalism and moralism and blue laws and life-denying practices that contradict the freedom-bestowing intention of Sabbath... Sabbath is a bodily act of... resistance to pervading values and assumptions behind those values.

If the intention of Sabbath is about freedom, I suggest some ideas of what Sabbath is *not* about: deprivation and strict laws, such as not being able to buy wine on Sundays, or a kind of piety that probably wouldn't fly with our Unitarian Universalist sensibilities. The Sabbath is not about simply escaping and ignoring the world, nor is it even primarily about resting, though that can be part of Sabbath observance.

Poet David Whyte tells a story about a time when he wasn't yet published, though he wrote poems. It was a time of his life where he was working very hard for a non-profit organization, trying desperately to save the world. But he was exhausted, and he knew it. He just didn't know what to do about it. He had a friend who was a Benedictine Monk, whom he asked for advice. *What should he do to not feel so exhausted all the time?*

And his friend, Brother David Steindl-Rast, suggested that the cure for exhaustion is not necessarily rest; it is *wholeheartedness*. Find what you can be wholehearted about, said Br. David, and you won't be so exhausted. You'll feel more free.

A liberating practice of wholeheartedness can move us toward what matters most in our lives....

A practice of wholeheartedness as Sabbath can help us find the resilience to move through a busy week, through hard times at home, hard news week in and week out. A liberating practice of wholeheartedness can move us toward what matters most in our lives, helping us resist pressures of our capitalist culture that say human value comes from our production and consumption—how much we can sell, earn, or buy.

The good news is that this kind of practice can look many different ways. But it is, truly, a practice. Because we just have to keep at it: trying, maybe not doing so well, and trying again. How do we build in moments of Sabbath rest and wholehearted listening throughout our days and weeks? I encourage us to think about a practice of Sabbath that does not necessarily mean taking a whole day, though those of you more practiced can show us how to do that.

Here's a simple practice that I do with my younger daughters most mornings. We kind of stumbled organically into it, but it works for us. Weekdays when I drive them to their preschool, as we cross the Tennessee River we simply say "Good morning, River!" And sometimes we note: Is the river foggy, is it calm, is it shiny, can we see any boats or birds?

Now, there are plenty of mornings that I forget. I am sometimes wrapped up in my head thinking about the day ahead,

or caught up listening to the radio. But usually my daughters remind me. They call from the back seat, *Good morning, River!* A couple of times we forgot, and they made me drive back so they could offer the greeting. And now we have taken to adding, *Good morning, fishes in the river! Good morning, sky and clouds! Good morning, birds!* And sometimes we sing, "I've Got Peace like a River."

That's it. A few moments on the morning drive. But it turns my heart towards what I love and what loves me back—my daughters and the land. And it resists the relentlessness of urgency. We stop and we look. We treat the earth as a friend whom we greet fondly. I carry the spaciousness and freedom of that moment into my day.

Here's another practice that is a kind of mindfulness activity you can do anytime, anywhere, to create a moment of Sabbath in time. Choose a color—say, the color yellow. Then spend some time out walking or driving, and put your attention on looking for the color yellow. You'll be surprised how much yellow you see when you start looking for it. It's like listening for the cricket in the middle of the big city. Practice enough and it becomes easier to find what we look for, even in the midst of noise.

Here's another. Choose a time each week—maybe just an hour, maybe a whole day—and put away the thing that usually takes your time, attention, energy. You might even physically put it away in a box for a while. Put your phone or your iPad out of sight. Put your to-do list of things into an envelope and seal it up. Cover up your TV with a cloth. Write down whatever is making you anxious and resolve to put it aside for a time, knowing it's mostly out of your control anyway. And see what happens.

If you are someone who goes, goes, goes—try taking a nap in the middle of the day, if you can. See what kind of wholehearted time opens up for you,

what comes up in you when you stop and let yourself rest.

Play can be a kind of Sabbath, too. In his book *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in Our Daily Lives*, Wayne Muller describes play as “engaging in purposeless enjoyment of one another.” Just do it with intention—delight in your friend or your partner or your kids or your neighbor. Focus on that for a while.

And here’s one more that can be a family practice. At the end of the day, try lighting a chalice candle and simply asking: *What was good today? What was hard? What do I need to let go of? What do I hope for tomorrow?* Create a few minutes of time out of time, tuning life to bigger questions.

I often include in my prayer and meditation the phrase, “...until all people have access to the gifts of this life.” A Sabbath practice helps us recognize those gifts, gifts which can’t be bought or sold, gifts that every person has a right to enjoy, wholeheartedly. As we find the gifts, may we share them. ■

Sabbath opens up a space of renewal and spiritual



sustenance. We hope that the CLF provides that for you through *Quest Monthly*, our online worship, daily reflections from the Daily Compass and more. We hope that you will be able to support the CLF in providing these gifts for the spirit by sending in a check in the enclosed envelope, or by contributing at clfuu.org/give. ■

The Ritual of Sabbath



BY SUE MAGIDSON
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I fell in love with the Sabbath many years ago when my work took me to Israel. Until then, I’d never thought much about the Sabbath, except to be annoyed when stores were closed on Sunday and I needed to buy something. In Israel, to my amazement—in the midst of fear and violence, with a backdrop of suicide bombings, missiles, gas masks, and bomb shelters—I discovered this gem of a spiritual practice that has nourished me ever since.

I admit that when I arrived in Israel, I wasn’t thinking about spiritual practices. In truth, I found it a huge frustration to have everything shut down one day each week. Public transportation stopped, and I had no car. Nearly everything was closed—malls, movie theaters, museums. What was I going to do with this empty day?

It took me a while to adjust to this unfamiliar rhythm, to realize that I was being given a holiday once a week.

Most Friday nights, a colleague would invite me home for dinner. There was no place else to go, nothing else to do, so we spent long evenings savoring the abundant food and conversation. It felt like Thanksgiving, but without the drama. My Saturdays were quiet days. Sometimes I slept in, or read, or went for a walk. Sometimes a friend with a car would take me to a national park.

Whatever I did, I *couldn’t* run errands and no one expected me to work. No one *ever* called me with a work question on the Sabbath. In fact, it was unusual for the telephone to ring at all.

This downtime was particularly notable because Israelis are the hardest working people I’ve ever met. They’re incredibly productive, keeping long hours during the workweek. How do they do it? I’d guess it has something to do with taking Sabbath time.

The Jewish Sabbaths I’ve experienced weren’t only about rest; they were also about pleasure. I know this may sound counter to those of you whose image of the Sabbath includes strict rules and *discomfort*—scratchy restrictive clothing, enforced quiet, prohibitions against dancing or singing or playing, and long hours in church or synagogue.

Orthodox Jews *do* observe long lists of prohibitions, but my experience of Orthodox Sabbaths was joyous, not dour. Jews do sing and dance on the Sabbath. Following G-d’s example in Genesis, what’s prohibited is the work of creation. Sabbath restrictions give Jews time to slow down—to appreciate each other and the everyday beauty surrounding us. In fact, in Jewish tradition, making love on the Sabbath is considered a special mitzvah—a particularly good thing.

The Jewish Sabbath is ushered in and out by beautiful rituals. It begins at sunset on Friday by gathering family, lighting candles, singing prayers, blessing the children, and enjoying a festive meal. Some of you may remember the scene in “Fiddler on the Roof” in which a Jewish peasant family puts on their finest clothes and sets a beautiful table to welcome the Sabbath. In Jewish tradition, *everyone* rests on the Sabbath, even the poorest, hardest working folks.

The Jewish Sabbath also ends with ritual. When three stars appear in the sky Saturday evening, Jews light a special braided candle and then douse it in a cup of wine. We also sniff cinnamon or cloves to carry the sweet memory of the Sabbath with us into the workweek.

There’s a lot of wisdom in these ancient practices—everyone taking Sabbath time together, marking the Sabbath with ritual and the setting sun, observing special rules that remind us that this is holy time.

What about you? How might you create holy time in your life, balancing work and rest, doing and being, creating and appreciating creation? ■



Vacation as Spiritual Discipline

BY JONALU JOHNSTONE,
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A series in the *Cathy* comic strip about vacationing caught my eye, perhaps because it was really about the opposite. In one sequence, a vacationing colleague calls Cathy to ask her to fax him a deal he had left her in charge of. In another, the only messages left for the boss are emails, faxes, and cell phone calls from “vacationing” employees, assuring him they’re easy to access if he needs them for anything.

This little series went on for quite awhile. You’d almost think they were onto some kind of phenomenon.

Then I read a business column whose author was upset at executives who do not get back to a newspaper columnist within a day of their phone call. That’s not good enough for business these days, the columnist asserts, and goes on to describe how one person called her back from the Olympic stadium while watching a gymnastics meet.

To which I say, *Oh, come on. Get over yourself.* Are we really so hooked into the working world that we can’t escape for a day or two? Or even watch a sports competition in peace without the interference of a phone call? We may have lost some of our ability to take vacation as seriously as it deserves.

There was, it seems, a time when... well, there was *more time*. When people had dinner together every night; when Sunday meant gathering with family and taking it easy; when weekends weren’t frantic, and going on vacation meant you were away from it all. I fear we’ve lost the capacity or even the inclination to let go and be gone. And with that, we’ve lost some important spiritual connections. That’s

why I want to reclaim the Spiritual Discipline of Vacation.

We could blame our drift from the sanity of peaceful escape on the Technology Era—the instant access provided by cell phones and emails and social media, the changing expectations of availability, the fraying of boundaries between home and work. Yet, I know we’re fighting a bigger issue—a human drive.

This problem did not start with the Internet or even the telephone. I’m certain of that because there have always been religious strictures that push us to let go of all that distracts us from genuine living. That’s what I think the Jewish Sabbath laws are about.

I’m not just talking about rest. Of course we understand the need for rest, for a break. Everyone knows that a good night’s sleep makes most problems easier to tackle. And when the mind just isn’t on top, even a five minutes’ stretch on the couch can do wonders. What we’re after here, though, is bigger than that.

The biblical Book of Leviticus, part of the Torah, lays out these demands and fits them into an even larger calendar of taking it easy. Every seventh year, says Leviticus 25, you shouldn’t work the land. You can eat anything that just naturally grows on it, but tilling and planting and harvesting is out. This is the origin of our *sabbatical*, that is, the academic and religious practice of taking significant time away from the regular working grind every seven years.

This may seem esoteric to you. Who cares what rules a group of tribal people put together six or seven hundred years before the Common Era? Well, this matters because it reminds us that there has always been a need to tell people to stop, to chill, to take a break, a breather.

Episcopal priest Barbara Brown Taylor has been practicing a weekly Sabbath for years. She sees it as quite different from the brief breaks most of us try to

take. In an article in *Christian Century* titled “Sabbath Resistance,” she says, “Plenty of us take an hour here or there and call it Sabbath, which is like driving five miles to town and calling it Europe.” Taylor writes that for the first couple years of Sabbath-keeping, her mind swam with questions. *Does looking at a catalog count as shopping? Is puttering in the garden work if I’m just entertaining myself?*

By the third year, she became capable of resting without leaving home, letting all the work go when Sabbath came. She now describes Sabbath as “an experience of divine love that swamps both body and soul.”

It’s hard for contemporary people to understand such an experience occurring on a weekly basis. For many of us, even occasionally achieving it seems improbable. Summer, though, may be our opportunity to try to stretch our minds around this concept. Authors Gary Schmidt and Susan Felch have compiled what they call a “spiritual biography” of summer.

In summer, they say, time “does not seem to move; instead, time *collects*, or perhaps it might be better said to *pool*. To halt in our headlong rush. To be fully in a particular time. To stop long enough to see what lies around us, rather than to be always merely glimpsing.” Maybe now, in the summer, we can construct for ourselves this new/renewed/renewing sense of time. There is a reason that we are ready for vacation. There are lessons we can learn here.

Vacation invites us to go out and play. Remember going out to play when you were a child? You didn’t go out with any intention beyond play. And something happened. Maybe it was ball; maybe it was house. Maybe it was making mud pies or climbing trees or chasing lightning bugs. Whatever, it simply came into being from the gathered children, or from you alone. Play

is spontaneous, fresh, lively, and refreshing.

As adults we play when we set out to follow Route 66 and see what comes along. Or walk down an unfamiliar street to see where it leads. Or stream-walk—in the creek more than alongside it. When we remember how to plop down on the ground and stare up through the trees, and watch the clouds drift by. Some of us can set aside our adult judgments and play freely with our children or our grandchildren.

Play, it's been said, is the work of children, what teaches them about the world. For us grown-ups, it's our refreshment. Vacations remind us to play. And there are no Sabbath strictures against it, no matter what our puritanical forebears may have said.

Significant in playfulness is spontaneity. Part of what vacation frees us from is our regular routines. We don't have to get up at our usual time. We eat different things, and when we feel like it, instead of on a schedule. We try something new—scuba diving or rock climbing or painting with watercolors. With nothing pressing to do, we notice the texture of the moss on rocks or the exact shade of blue of the lake. We take time to follow the song of the finch and try to catch a glimpse of bright feathers. Robbed of our routines, vacation demands spontaneity.

Sometimes we become most productive by letting go of the need to produce. Creativity, particularly, does not come when we are pressed for time. Rather, it grows out of the void, the emptiness, boredom—the same place that produces play, lightness, and spontaneity. Every creative artist knows that you have to let go and play with the ideas, the materials, and the arrangements to get there. You can't force it.

How often do we keep ourselves from doing nothing because we are convinced we have too much we *have* to do? We can only let loose—go on

vacation, or even take time in our everyday lives—if we can trust the world to go on accomplishing what it needs to get done without us. But it turns out that we are actually not crucial to the world staying on course. We become wrapped up in believing that our particular work, our peculiar approach is required, or all hell will break loose. It's not true.

This is not to say that what we do doesn't matter. We have to have a sense of purpose in our lives, an idea that we are making a real and valid contribution. The problem comes when we are so steeped in ego that we lose sight of our relatively small place in the scheme of the universe. Too easily, we get caught up in earning money, in producing things—essentially in making idols. Often, our egos are so tied to our achievements that they are very hard to release.

**To be in the moment—
Sabbath or not, vacation
or not; home, away;
summer, winter, spring,
fall—is core to all
religious traditions.**

That's why one of the spiritual lessons of vacation is letting go of our normal drive to achieve, to produce, to accomplish. And simply, instead, to be. It requires humility to understand that others will find a way to take over what we usually do, and they'll do fine. Or it can just go undone—for a day or a week. It takes even more humility to realize others may do it differently, and maybe even better. Don't you hate when that happens? But it's good for us.

It leads us to play, spontaneity, creativity, and ultimately to gratitude. If we make space for the goodness of life to creep into our awareness, we cannot help but be grateful. It's what we feel lying in a hammock in a gentle breeze.

It's our response to being overwhelmed with the love of family or friends surrounding us as we sing together or eat together or tell old stories that everyone already knows.

It's not really about a particular time in the summer, or a particular day of the week, or even a particular event in our lives like a vacation. We can do vacation wrong, as Wendell Berry describes in his poem, "Vacation," in which a man so diligently videotapes his trip down a river for later memory that he manages to entirely miss actually experiencing his vacation itself.

No, that's not the way. The way is to be in it. To be in the moment—Sabbath or not, vacation or not; home, away; summer, winter, spring, fall—is core to all religious traditions.

Alan Watts quoted the T'ang master Lin-Chi as saying, "In Buddhism there is no place for using effort. Just be ordinary and nothing special. Eat your food, move your bowels, pass water, and when you're tired go and lie down. The ignorant will laugh at me, but the wise will understand."

Jesus said, "Consider the lilies of the field. They neither toil nor spin. Yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these."

My favorite teacher, the Chinese Taoist Chuang Tzu, said, "Do not be an embodier of fame; do not be a storehouse of schemes; do not be an undertaker of projects; do not be a proprietor of wisdom. Embody to the fullest what has no end and wander where there is no trail. Hold on to all that you have received from Heaven but do not think you have gotten anything. Be empty, that is all."

May you make time in your life to play. May the riches of living wash over you spontaneously. May your heart know both gratitude and humility. May your life be composed of one moment after another of wonder, goodness, beauty and awe. ■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
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Years ago, I directed the UUA's Washington Office. It was a challenging time in U.S. history, marked by the passage of the civil-rights-denying Patriot Act, pompous patriotic righteousness about the need to attack Iraq, support for fundamentalist Christian-style "family values," and endless attacks on vulnerable communities. Nothing that Unitarian Universalists cared about had much of a chance of moving forward at that time, and I was in charge of our legislative advocacy.

My staff used to joke that I spent my time reframing what "success" meant, since it could never mean actually passing legislation we wanted. With all humility, I have to admit that reframing is something of a superpower for me. So we redefined success: How many op-eds could we get people to publish? How many UUs would gather and rally publicly against the latest horrible thing? How many ministers would go and speak to legislators? What new interfaith partnership could we join or convene? We were like Sisyphus, trying every day to push that boulder up the hill.

Though I am a master of reframing, and worked with wonderful people, gradually I could feel burnout and depression edge up on me. At the time, before blogs and before we could easily send out a formatted weekly newsletter, I sent out a weekly email update to people who were interested. One week, I shared how deeply discouraged and tired I was. The responses I received back were kind and understanding. Others were also tired and discouraged, and appreciated my honesty.

One email stood out from the rest. It was from a rabbi I knew, someone who I had worked with on many common agendas: Rabbi Arthur Waskow, who directed (and still does, at age 84) something called The Shalom Center. His email contained only three words: "Honor the Sabbath."

I wrote him back in something of a whine. How could I honor the Sabbath, I asked, when most Sundays found me out in some congregation or another, prodding people to take action and organize? He responded, "You're a UU, not exactly Orthodox. Take Sabbath some other day."

Each morning I would wake up early and think of at least one time in the day that would be a gift of rest and renewal to myself.

Desperate, I took his advice. Monday became my Sabbath. I hung out with my young child, stayed off the computer, avoided the news, made and ate good food, walked with my dog in Rock Creek Park. Gradually my week began to revolve around those Mondays, which revived me so that on Tuesday I could start pushing the rock up the hill again.

As so often happens, when I wasn't desperate anymore—when the despair and burnout subsided—I stopped doing the practice that had brought me respite. It wasn't until recent elections brought me to my knees again that the idea of Sabbath re-demanded my attention. I'm not as rigid about it as some people are (probably to my detriment), but I do take weekly time away from social media, news, emails, and phone calls. Simply to leave my phone and take a walk feels liberating. I am joyful to have brought the idea of Sabbath back into my life, and I vow not to let it go again.

Of course, this is not easy for everyone. I am aware, writing this, that people who are fulltime caregivers or currently incarcerated or holding down three jobs simply do not have the luxury of claiming a day for themselves. I wish that this were otherwise and a full day Sabbath was possible for everyone. Failing that, in the most stressful and overwhelming times of my life, I used my superpower of reframing in a way that really helped me. I offer it to you.

Each morning I would wake up early and think of at least one time in the day that would be a gift of rest and renewal to myself. It might be, literally, a bathroom break, where I would take my time and not rush with anxiety. Or it might be to focus on enjoying the minutes of transit between several demanding jobs, with plans to play particular songs on the radio. It might be holding a stone in my pocket and rubbing it when I was bored in a meeting.

I would plan these times out as pit stops, and I would center my day in them rather than in the



overwhelming avalanche of items to do in between them. I would think of them as the most important part of the day.

This really did work for me. While "Sabbath moments" are not as deeply satisfying as an entire Sabbath day, framing my day to make them central offered me some sense that rest was, indeed, at the core of who I was and what I was doing. Despite my constant sense of overwhelm, I could look forward to and savor these respites.

Sabbath moments, Sabbath days, Sabbath seasons—all are good for the soul. May you find a way to live into the renewal that comes from rest, wherever you may find it. ■

REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP



A few years ago, various members of the CLF staff were talking about taking a social media Sabbath for one day a week, and shared things like the graphics they would post to Facebook letting people know that they were unavailable for the day. Well, for starters, I think it's pretty cool that the CLF, as a church that operates largely online, would understand that ministers and ministerial interns might need a day each week away from the ceaseless input of social media to refocus and recharge. There's a lot to be said for an institution that values the mental and emotional well-being of the staff.

But here's the thing. I didn't *want* to take a social media Sabbath. Truth be told, the thought of taking an entire day a week away from Facebook made me just a tiny bit panic-y. I'm single, and my child is grown and out of the house. If I didn't have Facebook, who would I talk to? If I thought of something cute or clever, who would I tell? What would I do with my unoccupied time, when there really wasn't something I needed to be doing? Wouldn't I be bored in line at the grocery store?

And how would I know what my friends were up to? How would I know about the latest political outrage? What would I do without the opportunity to express my opinion on things that matter? How would I know that *I* mattered if there weren't people clicking "like" on the things I had to say? Nope. There was no way I was going to be taking a social media Sabbath. Not going to happen. Didn't want to. Just didn't care for the idea.

But the interesting thing about the concept of Sabbath, as invented by the Jews, is that it isn't really about what you want. It's a cherished tradition, and

everyone I've talked to or whose words on the subject I've read has said that they deeply love this special, set-

apart time of their week. But it's also a rule, a commandment, and there are lots of strictures about what exactly you are and aren't allowed to do.

It is not only forbidden to work. Orthodox Jews also do not shop or exchange money in any way, or cook, drive or even flip a light switch. It isn't particularly convenient. But the goal of the Sabbath is not convenience. It is a time that is meant to be different, a time in which you have as little impact on the world as you can. It is a break from creation, a time to let things be. Not because creation is bad, or work is bad—those are, in fact, deeply affirmed.

But, at least in the Jewish tradition, even those good things need to be periodically set aside in order to relate to the universe in a different way. And if that way is inconvenient, or you don't feel like it in the moment—too bad. Do it anyway. Because God said so. Because convenience might not actually be your highest moral value, in spite of what the world so often tells you.

And so, for the sake of experiment and writing this column, I tried it. I didn't unplug all of my electronics, but I let go of Facebook. Just for 24 hours. It was awkward, and any number of times I had to stop myself as I automatically went to click on a notification window that popped up on my screen. Why, I wonder, do I need to have what I'm doing interrupted any time someone responds to something I've said? Is any of it that urgent?

There were certainly times when I found myself at a loss as to what to do with myself. I lost the filler, the packing that I put in between the more useful parts of my day. Which meant that I had to be a little more creative, a little less habit-bound with what I did with my time. I got my hair cut, which tends

to fall by the wayside for much too long.

And yes, things happened that I didn't know about. But none of them were things that I could have changed if I'd known about them sooner. I only noticed when I came back to it how my anxiety level and my heart rate increased as I scrolled through what I'd missed.

Now, I'm not leaving Facebook. There is too much about it that I love, including the opportunity to be in touch with CLFers as well as other valued friends whom I might never meet in person. I like sharing my thoughts, and I like reading the thoughts of others—both those who support and those who challenge my beliefs.

I need to live in a world that pushes back against a false sense of urgency.

But I think I will build myself some social media boundaries, not because it'll be convenient, but because sometimes I need to live in a world that pushes back against a false sense of urgency, a world that declares that unoccupied time can be OK, and reminds me that the universe doesn't *always* need to know what I have to say.

But beyond that, I think that the practice of Sabbath, social media or otherwise, calls us to step out of habit, out of the well-worn tracks that we choose not because they serve health and wholeness but because they allow us the ease of doing what is familiar. I suspect I need to set myself some rules just so that I can live a bit more, as Thoreau said, "deliberately."

I think I need some boundaries, some limitations that, ironically, might actually free me to live more fully, more presently, more in touch with the Holy—that Interdependent Web which, it turns out, is not actually the same as the World Wide Web. ■



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Adjacent to Eternity

[One] who wants to enter the holiness of the day must first lay down the profanity of clattering commerce, of being yoked to toil. [S]he must go away from the screech of dissonant days, from the nervousness and fury of acquisitiveness and the betrayal in embezzling [her] own life. He must say farewell to manual work and learn to understand that the world has already been created and will survive without [his] help... Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to Someone Else. Six days a week we seek to dominate the world, on the seventh day we try to dominate the self...

The seventh day is a palace in time which we build. It is made of soul, of joy and reticence. In its atmosphere, a discipline is a reminder of adjacency to eternity.... How else express glory in the presence of eternity, if not by the silence of abstaining from noisy acts?

by **Abraham Heschel** (1907-1972), from *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, published in 1951 ■

