

Second Day Rosh Hashanah Sermon  
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Reimagining Shabbat!

This past summer, I spent a month at my family's summer cottage, outside Toronto, Canada. There are maybe fifteen, mostly multi-generational homes on the street, and most of these Jewish families have been there, seemingly forever. We see each other every summer, and at simchas and Shivas.

In July one of our neighbors, a retired life coach, sent an invitation to everyone on the street for a biweekly dialogue and discussion. I happened to be in town for one of the sessions, so I joined in. While there were a few people in their fifties around the table, I was by far the youngest. This is relevant, because the topic that morning was *life experiences that altered the way you looked at the world*.

The group went off topic numerous times, and at one point the conversation veered toward the rise of violence here in the United States and around the world.

Someone asked why is it that we hear so much more today about overdoses and violence, homicides and suicides. People voiced their opinions and then I offered a different perspective.

I suggested that kids today are addicted to technology. They access the news so much earlier. So much is sensationalized, and they spend more time with their iPads than with their parents.

Another person asked: but what is the solution? We need these technologies!

And then I, this newbie to the group, raised my hand and said: I have a solution. It's one word.  
Shabbos!

One, one person slapped his knee and said "YES." The others gave me skeptical looks. I mean, they knew I was as a rabbi. But I fully believe what I said.  
We need Shabbos.  
Shabbat.  
A day of rest.

We need it.

There is a piece of Talmud in tractate Shabbat, page 10B where God says to Moshe Rabeinu: I have a precious gift in My treasure vault. It's name is Shabbat. I intend to give this gift to the Jewish people. Go inform them.

That is what I want to do with you today. I want to remind you about the precious gift of Shabbat, and hopefully convince some of you to engage or re-engage with Shabbat, as a Rosh Hashanah-New Year's resolution.

Shabbat is more than just Friday nights and Saturdays on our calendar. There is a great deal more to Shabbat than a series of prohibitions. If you were taught Shabbat rituals but were never taught the meaning of the mitzvot, I hope this morning your interest will be piqued, and you will start 5779 with an intention to deepen your relationship to Shabbat. Yes, Shabbat follows an eat, pray, sleep framework, but if that is your only frame of reference then you are only touching the surface of what Shabbat ought to be.

In the 1990s, when we were not yet as addicted to our phones, Rabbi David Hartman z'l taught that the modern family is challenged, and *technological culture educates the individual to give up the old and customary and to adapt to the new.* (p.59) If we are always connected to our technology, and if we are constantly scrolling Google for the latest news and waiting until our favorite apps are downloading their most recent updates, then we are in a perpetual forward looking state. With all of the effort we expend seeking the newest thing, we leave less space in our brains for creating memories and remembering events and spending time in the here and now.

When we engage in technology, nonstop, for 7 days a week without a break, we lose a connection with the past and our heritage. Shabbat gives us a way of reconnecting with our past to embrace and be prepared for the present and the future.

Prioritizing sitting down at a table for Shabbat dinner, and saying the words *בְּרֵאשִׁית לְמַעֲשֵׂה יְזְרוֹן* and *מִצְרַיִם לִיְצִיאַת יְזָר* during kiddush, establishes a ritualization of a weekly reminder of both the Creation of the world (which we commemorate on Rosh Hashanah) and the Exodus from Egypt, one of the seminal moments in our People's history.

Simply reciting kiddush on Friday night enables us to remember where we came from. We can pause and rewind for a bit.

A popular and modern technological advancement that is the complete opposite of what Shabbat aspires to be is the selfie. With 90% of teens owning smart phones, one can only imagine how many selfies are taken each day.

Of course, selfies aren't just for kids. I love taking selfies. They are fun. And when I share them, they make me appear like I am fun too! In her book, *Einstein and the Rabbi*, Rabbi Naomi Levy writes that *a selfie, in spite of its name doesn't actually capture the self at all. It doesn't take in our interior world. It can't capture your mind, your soul, your longings, your feelings, your prayer. A selfie is all surface.* A selfie, Rabbi Levy argues, is false. It captures us doing one thing, at one specific and quick moment in time.

In a selfie, we appear large and backgrounds look like tiny specks. Selfies distort reality. During my summer vacation, I took tons of selfies as I walked by a lake each day. My sweaty head was bigger than the lake in every single photo. Lake Simcoe is nearly 300 square miles. But in the selfies I took, God's stunning and massive creation looked so much smaller than me. I admit, the photos were disproportionate.

There is nothing wrong with selfies. There's no harm in them. If you are a selfie taker, take as many as you like.

For six days a week.  
And then on Shabbat, stop.  
Put the phone down.  
Try it.  
For one day each week.

On Shabbat, what is big should be big, and what is small ought to remain small. Everything should be proportional. On Shabbat, we are given the opportunity to look at the world as the way it ought to be seen, without a filter or a screen.

When we *shamor*-observe and *zachor*-remember Shabbat, we are able to get back in touch with ourselves and our souls. On this upcoming Shabbat, I encourage you to attempt to take a soulfie, and get in touch with your

innermost person. Try to connect your soul to the souls of the others around you.

For most of us, the thought of parting with our devices sounds like a form of torture. I get it! For three days this summer, I was phoneless. It was not enjoyable. I was completely out of sorts. Couldn't use Google maps. Couldn't make a phone call. Could not look up a phone number. Could not text. And no pictures of Ariella existed for three whole days. Of those three days, one was Shabbat. I didn't freak out that day as much as the others, because I was used to turning off the tech on Shabbat. It does become natural. Try it.

If we have learned anything from the atrocities and senseless deaths that occurred on this date, on September 11 in 2001, it is that we never know what can happen or when our last day is.

Don't be the one that regrets you never had enough family time or leisure time because you were always checking the news or watching a game on TV. Put the phone down for part of Shabbat and talk to another person. Rabbi Gunther Plaut wrote that once a week Shabbat provides us with an opportunity to address persons rather than things. You can get that by going for a walk, coming to shul, davening and chatting with your friends during kiddush!

**Heschel wrote "The solution of mankind's most vexing problem will not be found in renouncing technical civilization, but in attaining some degree of independence of it." That is what we need to do. That is the gift of Shabbat. One Day a Week.**

One of my favorite aspects of Shabbat is the knowledge that, on Shabbos, we can easily act like God. How? By doing one of my favorite activities that I rarely get to do during the other six days of the week.

The opening verse of the Torah tells us that God created the heavens and earth. For six days of Creation God was busy creating. God made light and darkness, the sun, moon, stars, trees, animals, creepy crawly things and humanity. And then, God rested. God took a day to rest.

וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְכַל־מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:

*On the seventh day God finished the work that God had been doing, and God ceased on the seventh day from all the work that God had done.*

In Likutei Mahararan (page 35), Rav Nachman taught that *the purpose of Creation was Shabbat. Although last in the order of creation, Shabbat completed and was the goal, for which God brought everything else into existence.*

The purpose of all of Creation was ceasing from creating.

Meditate on that for a few seconds.

God's **purpose** of Creation was to cease from creation for a while.

We know that when God created us, we were created in God's image. So, therefore, we get to be like God by resting on Shabbat! (Not during this sermon!) If you employ kavanah, if you use intention when you take a rest on Saturday afternoon, then you are having a Shabbos Nap and you are acting like God! This is a hugely underrated dimension to Shabbos.

This is not a new idea that I found in a meme online. This is not a response to our postmodern multitasking lifestyles and the feeling like we are always being pulled into a million directions. That God wants us to rest on Shabbat is a timeless idea.

In every single Shabbat Amidah we say the words:

: אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ. רַצְּהָ בְּמִנוּחֵינוּ

*Our God and God of our fathers, May You be pleased and find favor with our Shabbat rest!*

When we rest on Shabbat, if it is a nap, or not working, or not using technology, however you want to understand the term--we want God to be happy with this form of rest!

During the Shabbat afternoon mincha service, we utter an entire paragraph about rest.

**יום מנוחה וקדשה לעמך נתת.**

*a day of rest and holiness You have given Your people*

אֲבָרְתֶם יָגַל יִצְחָק יִרְיֶן יַעֲקֹב וּבְנָיו יְנוּחוּ בוֹ. מְנוּחַת אֶהְבֶּה וּנְדָבָה. מְנוּחַת אֶמֶת וְאַמוּנָה. מְנוּחַת שְׁלוֹם וְשִׁלוֹה וְהַשְׁקֵט וְבִטָּח מְנוּחָה שְׁלָמָה שְׂאֵתָה רוּצָה בָּהּ.

*Abraham will rejoice, Isaac will sing for joy, Jacob and his children will find rest in it--a rest of love and generosity, a rest of truth and faith, a rest of peace and tranquility, calm and trust; a complete rest in which You find favor.*

יְכִירוּ בְנֵיךָ וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי מֵאַתָּה הִיא מְנוּחָתָם וְעַל מְנוּחָתָם יִקְדְּשׁוּ אֶת שְׁמֶךָ:

*May Your children recognize and know that their rest comes from You, and that by their rest they sanctify Your name.*

A Shabbos shluff should not only be enjoyable, but it is holy too.

The term Oneg Shabbat means the delight of Shabbat. In very clear terms, the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (76:10) teaches us that sleep is also an Oneg, one of the physical pleasures of Shabbat. This is how serious a role resting on Shabbat plays. We should delight that we can take this rest on the seventh day, just like God did.

**Resting and relaxing on Shabbat is a gift. God gives it to us every single week. Take advantage of the gift. Open it.**

**If you do something relaxing on shabbat, be it a nap, or a walk in the neighborhood, or play a game with a spouse, friend or child--use kavanah, a Shabbat intention, and then you are acting like God!**

There is one more reason I wish to encourage all of you to upgrade your Shabbat observance, and that reason is that Shabbat is a glimpse of the World to Come.

In the Talmud, in Brachot 57b, Shabbat is described as הַבַּא הָעוֹלָם מֵעֵין

Moshe Mykoff explains that when we observe Shabbat and leave behind the week's schedules, obligations and commitments, we replace outwardly directed activity with inwardly focused receptivity. We shed anxieties, fears and deadlines.

When this happens, time's hold on us is weakened. Therefore, on Shabbat, we taste a little bit of the freedom that comes with loosening the bonds of time. We are all so tethered to time and being places and going places. It is draining. I would hope that in the next world we keep less appointments!

Imagine what it might be like to set one day aside each week for romance, for family, for community, for learning and prayer. It can be a day of singing, good

challah, fine wine, sitting around with others and talking about what is on your mind, not where you have to be.

It can be a day for actively prioritizing the presence of God into our world. That sounds like the World to Come to me.

Every effort counts. If any Shabbat observance is not yet part of your week, take small steps. Start by *thinking* about how you can incorporate that Shabbat feeling into Friday night and Saturday. Maybe it is a nap, maybe it is a meal. Maybe it is DVRing your Friday night shows and catching them later in the week. Maybe it is pre planning a Saturday afternoon walk with a friend. Maybe it is committing to attending Friday night services, the short hour-long service with lots of singing, one time each month.

I am **not** suggesting that if Shabbat currently plays no part in your life, then you must immediately elevate the 25 hours of Shabbos, effective late Friday afternoon. Reb Nachman reminds us that Shabbat's holiness comes directly from God. Even if we ignore Shabbat, her sanctity is unaffected. Whenever we return to keep Shabbat, her sanctity is on hand to show us the way.

What I **am** suggesting is that every good intention and desire makes a difference. Don't you also want a taste of the world to come? It must be better than what we experience now.

As Rosh Hashanah is a time of resolutions, this is the resolution I invite you to do.

I am encouraging all of you to recommit to Shabbat. Obviously, I am not the police and won't come into your homes to check up on you.

But try for 5779-

To buy a grape juice or wine and a couple of challahs and turn Friday night into Shabbat. Make kiddush. Do a motzi. Make the dinner table a device free zone for that night. If the phone rings--don't answer it. Don't Instagram your meal. Don't check a fact on google. Just be present. And if you live alone--take a deep breath and call a friend. Make Shabbat dinner together. If you don't cook, take out works too.

If this is too big of a step for you, find some time on Saturday afternoon for a Shabbat rest. If you do, then you will act like God and will be opening God's gift to us.

Third, come to shul.

Friday night.

Saturday morning.

Saturday late afternoon and evening.

Come to all or choose one each week.

Commit to being with your community, here in our holy Sanctuary. If you are here on Shabbat, then you can surround yourself with song, kibitzing at kiddush, prayer, Torah and timeless messages. Spend time with likeminded people; people with shared values who all want this world to be a better place.

Ahad Haam famously said that more than the Jews have kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept the Jews. It would be horrible if his famous line no longer rang true.

I missed the rest of those Sunday morning cottage country discussions. It is September, and therefore they are on pause until next summer. But if I ever find myself around a table with those neighbors again any time soon, I will stick by my words.

What can we do to combat the reality of today?

What is the solution?

We need Shabbos!

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מְכַל־מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא

*And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done*

Why don't you try it too? I am pretty sure you will like it. Shana tova.