

*Moses then assembled the whole Israelite community and said to them: These are the things that the Lord has commanded you to do: On six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord...” (Exodus 35:1-3).*

Shabbat is not about doing nothing. It is about having. It is not about forbidding, it is about gifting. It is not about every day. It is about what is sacred.

We need time *not* to be about ourselves, not to be about our obligations, our jobs, our to-do list. You won't remember the stuff you insisted you had to do three months after you made that claim. You will have forgotten the things you said you had to do.

But you will not forget the deepest insights you learned at Torah study that Shabbat morning. You will not forget the rich exchange and connectivity you gained with your community at a Shabbat service. You will not forget holding hands with your beloved as you walk on a path you have made sacred because you are engaged in expressing your gratitude for the life you are living just then, just now, in that moment. These are the things of life. These things are sacred – they are sacred to us and to God.

Our text goes on to read this: The ones who do work shall suffer death.

You may not know this, but it is true: When we do not *do* Shabbat, when we ignore the Sabbath and violate it then we suffer a kind of death.

Jobs and errands and responsibilities – we can bury ourselves in such things; we can kill ourselves with our doing and running and tasking. We kill our spirit. We kill the things that give us life. We waste away our lives in *doing*. That is, to me, suffering a death of soul and spirit.

We think Shabbat is about doing nothing. No, my friends, there is so much more at stake here. Shabbat is about creating life. It is about creating sacred time and space for the divine in you, in others. It is about acknowledging the preciousness of life itself. A world of human beings taking one day a week to acknowledge the sacred? Sometimes I imagine the peace that could result, the taste of the world to come that could be.

The only people who gave me a glimmer of Shabbat when I was a child were my grandparents, who ate beautifully prepared meals every Friday night, who sometimes went to services Shabbat morning, who took walks and naps in the afternoon, who cared to invite family and friends over for tea and chat. But my own parents abandoned this world. Like many Jews, they did not attach much value to the idea of separating ordinary days from holy time. I suspect they thought of themselves as “cultural” Jews. At my house, the weekends were for cleaning the house and doing laundry and getting the yard work done.

I have had to learn that Shabbat was a gift I could accept. I have had to allow myself the transformation it brings to my life when I am in Shabbat mode. I have set before you life and death, Torah says: Choose life.

I have learned that I can choose life. I can choose life by honoring and observing and keeping Shabbat.

Start, just as I had to, with the smallest steps. Light candles and say the blessings to bring in and honor the gift of Shabbat on Friday night. Bless your children. Go to services whenever they are offered. Consider joining Torah study now and then; you will be absolutely amazed at what happens in that sweet hour every Saturday morning. Take a walk. Ask yourself if you will remember the task you said you had to do just six weekends from now. Ask yourself if you will remember the joy you had in appreciating, again, the love your spouse has for you, the sweet time you took with your children, the moment you said a silent prayer of thanks to God for the crocus blooming in the garden, the scent of rain falling, the sight of a wren at the birdfeeder.

Eventually, you will want more and more of the sacred. You will long for it. The sacred gives meaning. The sacred gives life. Shabbat is sacred.

It's not about doing nothing. It's about practicing your consciousness of divine. It's about acknowledging the sacred. It's about choosing life.

Bless and keep the Sabbath and it will keep you.