Shabbat

Hebrew/English Source Sheet

This material was prepared by Rabbi Yonatan Neril and Evonne Marzouk of Canfei Nesharim, as part of the Jewcology project.

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1. Creation and Shabbat

Genesis 2:1-3, Judaica Press translation
1. Now the heavens and the earth were completed and all their host. 2. And G-d completed on the seventh day His work that He did, and He abstained on the seventh day from all His work that He did. 3. And G-d blessed the seventh day and He hallowed it, for thereon He abstained from all His work that G-d created to do.

Discussion Question:
Why does the Torah teach us that G-d rested on the seventh day?

Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, France, 1040-1105 C.E., commentary to Genesis 2:1-3, based on Midrash Genesis Raba 10:9)
And G-d completed on the seventh day: Rabbi Simon said: [A human being of] flesh and blood, who cannot [exactly] know his times and his moments, must add from the profane to the holy [i.e., he must add some time to the Sabbath.] The Holy One, blessed be He, Who knows His times and His moments [exactly], entered it [the Sabbath] within a hairbreadth, and it therefore appeared as if He completed it [His work] on that day. Another explanation: What was the world lacking? Rest. The Sabbath came, and so came rest. The work was completed and finished.

Nachalat Yaakov, commentary on Rashi above by Rabbi Yaakov Selnik, 17th century, Crakow, Poland,
If G-d had not connected the seventh day to the [six] days of creation, the nature of people and creatures would have been to toil and work day and night, without desisting, and it would not have been in the nature [of people] to rest and relax. If so, the body would destruct on its own and the world would be destroyed to oblivion. But now that G-d linked the seventh day [to the other six days] and on it “He rested and was refreshed,” therefore there descended to the world the instinct to desist, rest, and find relaxation for one’s soul until it recuperates.

Discussion Question: Do you feel an instinct to rest?

2. Isaiah and Rejoicing on Shabbat

If you restrain your foot because of the Sabbath, from performing your affairs on My holy day, and you call the Sabbath a delight (oneg), the holy of the Lord honored, and you honor it by not doing your habituated ways, by not pursuing your affairs and speaking words.

Then, you shall delight with the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the high places of the land, and I will give you to eat the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Radak (Rabbi David Kimchi (France, 1160-1235), commentary to Isaiah 48:14, translation by Y. Neril)
If you will rejoice with the Shabbat, you will rejoice with G-d, which is to say that G-d will bestow on you good things to the point that you will rejoice with Him, and you will give thanks to Him and for His goodness, because everything comes from Him and is in His hand. The rejoicing with G-d is a soul pleasure.

Rabbi Shalom Noach Borozovsky, Netivot Shalom, 2nd drash on Parshat Tazria, 1st section, seventh paragraph, p.53, translation by R’ Neril
This is the highest level of the holy Sabbath, to arrive at 'then you will rejoice with G-d' (Isaiah 58:14), and this is the purpose of a Jew in the holy Shabbat, to devote all of his pleasures to rejoicing with G-d. And this is the entire purpose of a Jew in his world...

Discussion Questions:
1. What is Oneg Shabbat?
2. How can we access it?
3. What practices facilitate the experience of Oneg?

A. Conscious Movement
And you shall honour it, not doing your own ways. 1 'and you shall honour it', that your Sabbath garments should not be like your weekday garments, and even as R. Johanan called his garments 'My honourers'. 2 'Not doing your own ways', that your walking on the Sabbath shall not be like your walking on weekdays. 'Nor finding your own affairs': your affairs are forbidden, the affairs of Heaven [religious matters] are permitted. 'Nor speaking your own words:' that your speech [conversation] on the Sabbath should not be like your speech on weekdays. 'Speaking': speech is forbidden, but thought [about mundane matters] is permitted. Now, as for all [the rest], they are intelligible; but what is meant by, 'that your walking on the Sabbath shall not be like your walking on weekdays'? — As R. Huna said in Rab's name-others state, R. Abba said in R. Huna's name: If one is walking on the Sabbath and comes to a stream of water, if he can put down his first foot before lifting the second, 3 it is permitted; 4 otherwise it is forbidden. 5 Raba demurred: What shall he do? Shall he go round it? Then he increases the walking [distance]! 7 Shall he cross it [walking through]? His garments may be soaked in water and he is led to wringing [them] out! 8 Rather [in such a case], since it is impossible [otherwise], it is permitted [to jump across]. But [what is meant] 9 is as Rabbi asked R. Ishmael son of R. Jose: Is it permitted to take great strides on the Sabbath? 10 — Who then permitted it on weekdays? he replied; for I maintain that a long stride takes away a five hundredth part of a man's eyesight, 11 and it is restored to him by the evening Kiddush.
Midrash Tanchuma, on Torah portion of Genesis, section 2, translation by Avrohom Davis

"Or discussing the forbidden." This brings to mind the mother of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who was engaged in a conversation on Shabbos. He said to her, 'Today is Shabbos,' so she was quiet. Rabbi Chanina said: They only allowed greeting on Shabbos reluctantly.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat, p. 113a-b, Soncino translation

'Nor speaking your own words:' that your speech [conversation] on the Sabbath should not be like your speech on weekdays. 'Speaking': speech is forbidden, but thought [about mundane matters] is permitted.

Discussion Question:
Based on these sources, how do the Sages instruct a person to speak on Shabbat?

C. Conscious Thought

Exodus 20:8-9, Judaica Press translation
Six days may you work and perform all your labor, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord, your G-d; you shall perform no labor, neither you, your son, your daughter, your manservant, your maidservant, your beast, nor your stranger who is in your cities.

Rashi to Exodus 20:8-9, Judaica Press translation
and perform all your labor: When the Sabbath arrives, it shall seem to you as if all your work is done, that you shall not think about work.

Discussion Question:
What would allow you to quiet your mind to prevent thoughts about work and the week on Shabbat?

3. Spiritual Pleasure and Physical Pleasure

Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Shapira, the Pyasesna rebbe, Derech Hamelech, p. 244 (teaching on Shabbat Tshuva), translation by Y. Neril:

"Israel fulfills the Torah and their purpose is to come to 'And in Him you will cleave,' and G-d fulfills the Torah and His purpose is to cleave, as if it is possible, with Israel…"

"…the essence of pleasure (ta'anug) is in revealed holiness. And anyone who seeks after pleasures and lusts (ta'avot) of this world must be someone whose soul does not feel the pleasure of revealed holiness. This [seeking] is empty, and it appears to the person that he or she will become full through the pleasures of this world. Because the desire does not become full through the pleasures of this world, since it yearns for the
pleasures of holiness, it further adds sin to iniquity, desire on top of desire, G-d forbid. Distancing oneself from these is possible only by a person who makes their soul happy in the pleasures of holiness and by unifying in holiness, so that a higher light is revealed to them [the desires]. The world errs in saying that the trait of [material] contentment is difficult [spiritual] work. In truth, one who makes their soul happy in holiness, as mentioned above, has their soul happy and joyous in its holiness, and [material] contentment comes about on its own. Then a person does not [feel a] need to make themself drunk in the pleasures of this world and to fill through them the yearnings and desires of their soul."

Discussion Questions:
1. Do you think that a person can become full by the material pleasures of this world?
2. If not, what would allow for you to feel full?
3. Is there a type of spiritual work which would make a difference?

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