

SESSION 1:

To be a Jew is...

To be a Jew is to wrestle

When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him.

Then he said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking." But he answered, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me."

Said the other, "What is your name?" He replied, "Jacob."

Said he, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed."

-Genesis 32:26-29

וַיֵּרָא כִּי לֹא יָכַל לוֹ וַיִּגַע בְּכַף-יָרְכוֹ וַתִּקַּע כַּף-יָרְךָ יַעֲקֹב
בְּהֶאֱבָקוֹ עִמּוֹ:
וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחְנִי כִּי עָלָה הַשָּׁחַר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶשְׁלַחְךָ כִּי
אִם-בְּרִכְתּוֹנִי:
וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מַה-שְּׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב:
וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאמָר עוֹד שְׁמֶךָ כִּי אִם-יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי-
שָׂרִית עִם-אֱלֹהִים וְעִם-אָנָּשִׁים וַתּוֹכַל:

CONVERSATION

- To be a member of the people of Israel has always been a struggle. Sometimes the struggle is with Divinity/God, sometimes with fellow human beings, and sometimes with ourselves as we strive to do what is right. Which of these struggles resonate with you?
- Think about your own personal challenges. Do you have a place, either physical or spiritual, where you find refuge? How does this inform your ideas about the Jewish People and Jewish spaces?

To be a Jew is to give of yourself

Introduction

The idea that we see expressed by the Rabbis is that when we open up to the trait of gratitude, we are able to see clearly how much good there is in our lives. By consciously engaging in the practice of gratitude, we become grateful, which in turn transforms us into people who can find the positive in life. There is an understanding that to be grateful takes practice and effort. This practice by no means ignores that we still live with pain or that we lack for important things in our lives. It does, however, provide us with a tool to help us balance our focus between the things we lack and the good we have.

Text

Our Rabbis taught: It is forbidden to a man to enjoy anything of this world without a benediction, and if anyone enjoys anything of this world without a benediction, he commits sacrilege...

Rabbi Judah said in the name of Samuel, "To enjoy anything of this world without a benediction is like making personal use of things consecrated to heaven, since it says, 'The earth is the Eternal's and the fullness thereof' (Psalms 24:1)."

Rabbi Levi contrasted two texts. It is written, "The earth is the Eternal's and the fullness thereof," and it is also written, "The heavens are the heavens of the Eternal, but the earth hath God given to the children of men!" (Psalms 115:16).

There is no contradiction: in the one case it is before a blessing has been said, in the other case after.

ת"ר אסור לו לאדם שיהנה מן העוה"ז בלא ברכה וכל הנהנה מן העוה"ז בלא ברכה מעל
אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל כל הנהנה מן העוה"ז בלא ברכה כאילו נהנה מקדשי שמים שנא' לה' הארץ ומלוא. ר' לוי
רמי כתיב לה' הארץ ומלואה וכתיב השמים שמים לה' וארץ נתן לבני אדם
לא קשיא כאן קודם ברכה כאן לאחר ברכה.

—Talmud Bavli, Berachot 35a-b

CONVERSATION

- How did the Rabbis believe we should practice gratitude?
- What are the Rabbis saying in the opening statement in the first lines?
- Explain Rabbi Judah's statement.
- What contradiction does Rabbi Levi point out in the verses he cites?
- Explain the resolution offered by the Rabbis.
- How can this relate to our own lives?

To be a Jew is to rest and reflect

Background

Another tool that Judaism provides to help us lead a more mindful/conscious life is Shabbat. Shabbat is traditionally seen as a precious gift given to the Jewish people. It is a day set aside to stop all acts of creation and attempts to achieve mastery over our world. We are forbidden from engaging in *melachah*. In his essay entitled "Shabbat and Holidays," in the *Etz Hayim Chumash*, Rabbi Joel Roth teaches that *melachah* is defined as "a constructive human act, initiated on the Sabbath, demonstrating supremacy over nature." On this day when we are forbidden from engaging in new construction, we have the opportunity to reflect on what is and on what we have.

We have the opportunity to deepen our awareness of what is in our lives. As opposed to producing more, Shabbat opens the possibility of deepening our awareness of and relationship with what already exists. In addition to the prohibitions of the day, Shabbat is filled with positive commandments of what we are obligated to do on this day. Many of these obligations can help us block out our everyday distractions in order to lead more mindful/conscious lives.

Text

Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

but the seventh day is a sabbath of your God, God: you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements.

For in six days God made heaven and earth and sea—and all that is in them—and then rested on the seventh day; therefore God blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

שמות כ:ח-יא

זְכוֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ:

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל-מְלֶאכֶתְךָ:

וַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה כָּל-מְלֶאכֶה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ-וּבִתֶּךָ עַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתֶּךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת-יָמִים עָשָׂה יי אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֶת-הַיָּם וְאֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-בָּם וַיִּנַּח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל-כֵּן בֵּרַךְ יי אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת

וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ:

-Exodus 20:8-11

Session 1: To be a Jew is...

Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as your God has commanded you.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

but the seventh day is a sabbath of your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements, so that your male and female slave may rest as you do.

Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore your God has commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

דברים ה:יב-טו

שְׁמֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה " אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל-מְלַאכְתְּךָ:

וְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת ל'" אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָל-מְלֶאכֶה אֹתָהּ וּבְנֵךְ-וּבִתֶּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ-וְאִמְתֶּךָ וְשׂוֹרְךָ וְחֹמְרֶךָ וְכָל-בְּהֵמַתְךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר

בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ עַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתֶּךָ כְּמוֹךָ:

וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי-עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיֹּצֵאֲךָ " אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִשָּׁם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֵרַע נְטוּיָה עַל-כֵּן צִוָּה " אֱלֹהֶיךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-יוֹם

הַשַּׁבָּת:

–Deuteronomy 5:12-15

The Israelite people shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout the ages as a covenant for all time:

it shall be a sign for all time between Me and the people of Israel. For in six days God made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day [God] ceased from work and was refreshed.

שמות לא:טז-יז

וְשָׁמְרוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-הַשַּׁבָּת לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתָם בְּרִית עוֹלָם:

בֵּינִי וּבֵין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אוֹת הוּא לְעֹלָם כִּי-שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים עָשָׂה " אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת וַיִּנְפָשׁ:

–Exodus 31:16-17

QUESTIONS

- Exodus 20:11 and Deuteronomy 5:15 give two very different reasons as to why we are commanded to remember the Sabbath. What are they?
- How can remembering the stories of creation and the exodus help us to live more mindful/conscious lives?
- Shabbat can serve as an opportunity to live a more mindful/conscious life as we stop creating and live within what already exists in our lives. What Shabbat practices help us to deepen our relationship with what already exists in our lives?
- What enslaves you personally? What enslaves others in our personal world and the global world? How can pausing every week to remember our slavery in Egypt help us to live more mindful/conscious lives?
- Read Exodus 31:16-17. What was the result of God's cessation from work in verse 17?
- The word "refreshed" comes from the Hebrew root nefesh. The word *nefesh* is commonly translated as "soul." The *Etz Hayim* commentary notes that this word refers to a person's life essence, vitality, psychic energy, or essential character. Used here, it seems to convey the idea of a fresh infusion of spiritual and physical vigor, a revival of God's total being. What Shabbat activities lend themselves to reviving oneself, both spiritually and physically?

Text

The movement from weekday work to Shabbat rest is a move from acting outward to developing inward. The Shabbat is more than a day of being, it is a day of becoming. Rest is more than leisure from work, it is a state of inner discovery, tranquility, and unfolding. The ability to accept and affirm life in its own right frees me to become more than I am — through self-development and through intensified relationships with others. The Sabbath commandment is not just to stop working, it is actively to achieve a state of *menuchah* (rest) through self-expression, transformation, and renewal. On this day, humans are freed and commanded to explore themselves and their relationships until they attain the fullness of being...

The Shabbat is a response to routinization by creating a temporal counterculture, an island of special existence within the stream of time... In becoming holy, the human being shifts from unexamined life to examined life, from instinctual existence to conscious being... Only one who is conscious of every moment can make choices or apply a hierarchy of values in every act of life. Thus, the detailed Sabbath ritual, which appears to prescribe everything by rigid rules, is really an assertion of consciousness and one's freedom to imbue every gesture and experience with value. It takes discipline and awareness to make these moves correctly. In this area, as in so many others, freedom grows in the womb of structure. And since every gesture is willed and directional, it is rich in meaning and statement. Every move on Shabbat is part of a dance of holiness. — Rabbi Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way*, pp. 139–140, 147–148

QUESTIONS

- According to Rabbi Greenberg, what does the *menuchah*, rest of Shabbat, create?
- How can changing our usual patterns of behavior on Shabbat lead to mindful/conscious living?
- Explain how the structure of Shabbat has the potential to give people freedom.

Background

The following text comes from the *Mishneh Torah*, the work of Moses Maimonides, “Rambam” (1135–1204). Maimonides is known as one of the greatest rabbinic authorities and philosophers in post-Talmudic times. His *Mishneh Torah* is a codification of Jewish law. Its purpose was to clarify the laws found within the Talmud in plain language without citing all the difficulties and variant opinions found within the Talmud, so that the law should be clear and accessible to all. The following section deals with the laws of Shabbat. The laws of Shabbat have the ability to help us lead a more mindful/conscious life. While we often think of Shabbat as a series of prohibitions, the Shabbat actually contains many positive commandments as well. The following text outlines the categories of obligations connected to Shabbat.

Consider the specific practices connected to the observance of the Sabbath that can bring mindful/conscious living into your weekly routine.

Text

There are four [dimensions] to the [observance of] the Sabbath: two originating in the Torah, and two originating in the words of our Sages, which are given exposition by the Prophets. [The two dimensions originating in the Torah are the commandments “Remember [the Sabbath day]” and “Observe [the Sabbath day].”

[The two dimensions] given exposition by the Prophets are honor and pleasure, as [Isaiah 58:13] states: “And you shall call the Sabbath ‘A delight, sanctified unto God and honored.’”

משנה תורה, הלכות שבת ל:א'
ארבעה דברים נאמרו בשבת שנים מן התורה ושנים מדברי סופרים והן מפורשין על ידי הנביאים. שבתורה זכור (א) ושומר. ושנתפרשו על ידי הנביאים כבוד ועונג שנאמר וקראת לשבת עונג ולקדוש ה' מכובד

-Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Shabbat, 30:1

QUESTIONS

- What four categories of obligation are connected to the Sabbath?
- Before looking at the chart on the opposite page, how would you define each of the categories of Shabbat? What Shabbat activities might you assign to each category?

Activity

The chart on the following page describes the definitions Rambam applies to each of the four categories of Sabbath observance. Print the chart and fill in specific Shabbat activities that you think fall under each of these categories.

Review the acts you filled in to the four quadrants. Which of these acts do you think can help you to lead a more mindful and conscious life?

WRAP-UP QUESTIONS

- Which aspects of wrestling / giving / shabbat do I currently integrate in my life?
- Which would I like to try to integrate into my life, and how can I start doing that in the next week? (write or speak or draw)

The Four Categories of Sabbath Observance

Remember זָכוֹר
Remember with words

Observe שָׁמַר
All the laws prohibiting
melachah on Shabbat

Honor כָּבוֹד
Anticipation and preparation

Delight/Joy עֵנָה
Delighting in and enjoying
the Sabbath day



Inspiring
Jewish
Homes