

Every January we, along with Northwest Yearly Meeting, pause to reflect on our Peace Testimony
This year the Yearly Meeting has chosen the theme: Sabbath as Peace-Making

Genesis 2:1-3

The Creation story tells us that God "rested" on the seventh day
The Creation story is not a literal rendition of creation
Rather it is a poetic story expressing the big picture of creation
Days 1-6 God creates the universe, earth, and all living creatures
Day 7 God sits back with a grin and surveys creation
God is resting in the knowledge of a job well done and delighting in the creation
In so doing, God models a reflective practice rooted in celebration and delight

Exodus 20:8-11

In the 10 Commandments given to Moses, the Israelites were given laws by which to order their lives
One of those laws was to remember the Sabbath day and to keep it holy
They were to work 6 days but they were to set aside the 7th day as a day of rest
Within this commandment, they were reminded of God's rest and delight in completing creation

Matthew 22:36-40 A lawyer asked Jesus, "*Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?*"
[Jesus] said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Today, we no longer live under the law, nor the penalties of the law
While the penalties for breaking the Sabbath were severe in Old Testament times
We are no longer bound by those same laws

Hebrews 4:9 reminds us that "a Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God."

As we enter into the Kingdom of God, we find this time of Sabbath rest
It is a place of renewal and respite—a place where we can be recentered and find our way again

Rather than see Sabbath as a law to be obeyed—I like to think of it as a gift—a gift of time apart

Some religious traditions continue to hold the Sabbath as law
Besides the Jews, there are Seventh-day Adventists and some other traditions
As a child, we did not hold to the law of Sabbath
But my grandparents refused to do anything on Sunday that caused another to work
They did milk the cows and feed the chickens on Sunday
They said it was ok to buy milk for the baby if you were out, but better to plan ahead
In fact, in general Sundays were a minimalist day in which many things were closed

Today, most people treat Sunday like Saturday—just another day on the weekend
Even for those who go to church, the rest of the day isn't much different
It is rare for stores to be closed on Sunday
Little league games take place on Sunday—even on Sunday mornings
Our culture no longer sets aside the day as a church day/day of rest
In that sense, we've lost the idea of Sabbath—of setting aside a day for rest or for God

Could there be purpose for Sabbath—without resurrecting the law of Sabbath?

In the book *The Sabbath* Abraham Heschel says the Sabbath is not a respite so we can go back to work
Instead we should see Sabbath as the goal of the week—the day to which we look forward
The Sabbath is the culmination of all our labors
On the Sabbath we sit back with satisfaction, celebrate, and reflect on the good work done

The Sabbath—or Shabbat, as it is called in Hebrew¹

It is one of the best known and least understood of all Jewish observances.

People who do not observe Shabbat think of it as a day filled with stifling restrictions,
or as a day of prayer like the Christian Sabbath.

But to those who observe Shabbat, it is a precious gift from God,
a day of great joy eagerly awaited throughout the week,
a time to set aside all of our weekday concerns and devote ourselves to higher pursuits.

Shabbat is the most important ritual observance in Judaism.

It is the only ritual observance instituted in the Ten Commandments.

It is also the most important special day, even more important than Yom Kippur

Shabbat is primarily a day of rest and spiritual enrichment

On Shabbat, we eat more elaborately and in a more leisurely fashion

On Shabbat we remember—more than not forgetting—remembering the purpose of Shabbat

Remembering that God took the 7th day to celebrate creation and freedom from Egypt

In modern America, we take the five-day work-week so much for granted
that we forget what a radical concept a day of rest was in ancient times.

The weekly day of rest has no parallel in any other ancient civilization.

In ancient times, leisure was for the wealthy and the ruling classes only,
never for the serving or laboring classes.

In addition, the very idea of rest each week was unimaginable.

The Greeks thought Jews were lazy for having a "holiday" every seventh day.

If for the ancient people of Israel this day of Sabbath was a radical concept for a day of rest...

What is it that our culture today needs? Not another law or day of imposed restrictions!

But in our 24/7 culture where we never stop—we do need respite!

Not only do we always have our phones so we can get a phone call anywhere, anytime
now we have email with us on our phones

I find myself picking up the phone in odd quiet moments when I'm waiting

How many hours per week do we work if we're honest? 60 or even 80 for some people

We believe that the way to get ahead in life is to work harder and smarter

We live in a driven society

We don't even take our vacations

A new study has found that U.S. workers forfeited \$52.4 billion in time-off benefits in
2013 and took less vacation time than at any point in the past four decades.

American workers turned their backs on a total of 169 million days of paid time off, in
effect "providing free labor for their employers, at an average of \$504 per
employee," according to the study.

One researcher said productivity increased by 80% after a vacation—we need vacation²

¹ <http://www.jewfaq.org/shabbat.htm>

² <http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/22/travel/u-s-workers-vacation-time/>

While I don't call for a return to the legalism of the past with rules about what to do/not do on Sabbath
I do think we would benefit from seeing Sabbath as a gift
 When I have time to center and refocus—I make better decisions
 It is why we are looking at Sabbath as Peace-Making
 When we are caught up in our driven 24/7 world we don't do our best work
 No wonder we come out fighting
 We need to pause and re-center—both individually and as whole communities
Before we do that on a grand scale—it behooves us to pause ourselves
 When and where have I gotten caught up in a culture that drives and demands more?

How can I make Sabbath a day of celebration and reflection?
 What do I need to let go of so that I can allow the Sabbath rest?
 Would it help if I spend a day without...? TV? Email? Computer? Work?
 When have I felt compelled to work extra hours? Was it really necessary?
 Have I taken the vacation that I was promised?

When have I taken time to simply enjoy God's creation?
 Do I ever simply pause and reflect on the good work accomplished this week?
 Who is important to me in my life? Do I spend time with them? Who am I forgetting?

Do I spend time with friends and family?
 It used to be common that people would go visit friends and family for a weekend
 But we rarely do that anymore
 Close family yes—but what about other friends in our lives?

Sabbath is a gift—will I accept it?