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The Sabbath as Law, as Philosophy, and as Model  
for a Theory of Leisure

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Importance of the Sabbath

If one had to choose the single institution most directly responsible for the survival of the Jewish people, it would unquestionably be the Shabbat. More than any other Jewish religious institution, it has not only kept us alive and distinct, but it has benefited the entire world. As a social concept structuring the week and allowing the laborer regular respite from his work, it has, by virtue of the Jewish influence on Christianity and Islam, allowed its beneficial effects to filter through to all of Western civilization.

The Shabbat is not, as the naive modern sometimes imagines, the invention of a group of bright legislators who were confronted by a social and economic problem at the time of Moses, and decided to come up with a solution couched in religious terms. It is, in Jewish tradition, quite important, the fourth of the Ten Commandments, and the only one of the so-called "ritual observances" mentioned in the Decalogue. So important is Shabbat, that Halakhah (Jewish law) considers the public desecration of the Sabbath the equivalent of idolatry -- the rejection of all of Judaism, the entire Torah. The Bible <sup>regards</sup> ~~considers~~ Shabbat as berit olam, beini u-vein benei visrael, an "eternal covenant" between God and Israel. The observance of the Sabbath is thus a symbolic assent to the terms of the covenant or the



special relationship between God and Israel. Sabbath observance, therefore, despite its large-scale contemporary neglect, should never be taken lightly, as merely the vestigial practice of some tradition-bound remnants of the community, because it is indeed the essence of Judaism.

A measure of its importance is the precedence granted to the Sabbath over the Temple in Jerusalem, the Beit Ha-mikdash. The building of the Temple (or the Tabernacle) could not proceed on the Sabbath day. More than that, this idea that the Temple could not be constructed on Shabbat became the model for Sabbath legislation. Which kinds of labor are forbidden on the Sabbath? Specifically, those kind<sup>s</sup> of labor that are used in the construction of the Temple. Shabbat is thus regarded by our Tradition as a more important religious institution than the Temple. It certainly, therefore, is a much more important Jewish activity than attending services. That is why, in traditional Judaism, according to the Bible and Talmud and Codes, the violation of the Shabbat in order to attend services in a synagogue represents a perversion of values, because the Shabbat must always remain superior to services and to temple.

Therefore, <sup>to refer</sup> ~~if I may just briefly refer~~ to the realities <sup>of our contemporary situation.</sup> ~~which bring you here, I would say that~~ it is naive to suggest as a compromise on the problem of opening the Centers on the Sabbath the offer (which <sup>may be</sup> ~~I have~~ discovered in perusing <sup>some of the current</sup> ~~your~~ literature) -- "let us open the Center on Saturdays, but not during the time of services."



Now that may be a pragmatic solution where the problem is one of institutional competitiveness, but it is really quite irrelevant to our situation and, in addition, it betrays a Christian bias as to the meaning of the Sabbath day -- as if the Sabbath were a church-oriented phenomenon which expressed<sup>s</sup> itself primarily in worship and liturgy. That is not true. It includes attendance at services, it includes the synagogue, but that is only incidental to the essence of the Sabbath as such.

#### Biblical Reasons for Sabbath Observance

~~Let us return to our theme.~~ What are the motives for the Sabbath legislation in the Bible? We have two reasons, and they appear in the differing versions of the Decalogue, the first in Exodus, the second in Deuteronomy.

In the 20th Chapter of Exodus (v.8-11), we read: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy... For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it." ~~This tells us that~~ Sabbath observance is an affirmation of the divine creation of the world. When I observe the Sabbath, I assert by my actions (or by my inactivity) ~~if you will~~ that God created heaven and earth. This reflects the theme of the beginning of the second chapter of Genesis. At the end of the six days of creation we read, "And the heavens and the earth and all that is within them were completed. And on the seventh day God finished His work which He had made.



And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it." The Sabbath, according to this passage too, celebrates the divine creation of the cosmos. The whole concept can exist without the participation or acknowledgement of man. The Sabbath is holy even if man fails to observe it. Yet when man does observe the Sabbath, his observance is in effect a proclamation of divine creation and mastery of the world; it is a form of testimony. (That is why the Kiddush is recited while standing, since it is testimony, and in Jewish law the witnesses testify while standing.)

In Deuteronomy, however, we read "you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord thy God took thee out of there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore did the Lord thy God command thee to observe the Sabbath day" (Dt. 5: 12-15). Even as the first of the Sabbath commandments affirms God's creation, the second version affirms the Exodus, which is the celebration of the theme of freedom. Here we speak of God not only as Master of Nature, but also as Lord of History; not only as the One Who creates <sup>all</sup> <sup>of the universe,</sup> mute objects, but as the One Who involves Himself in the destiny and the fate of man. From this event, there issues the Jewish esteem of freedom, repeated every week by means of observance of Shabbat, something which ~~must~~ inevitably impress<sup>ed</sup> itself upon the Jewish folk consciousness. No wonder that Jews, even the most secularized, carry within themselves an unconscious heritage of cherishing freedom and the rights of man. We do not consider this freedom



~~that we cherish~~ <sup>and</sup> these elemental rights of man, as something <sup>granted</sup> ~~given~~ to us by a political or social contract; they are God-given, and they are therefore inviolate. This theme is stressed in our American Declaration of Independence where we say that we were "endowed" with these rights by our Creator and that the function of government is to "secure" them.

These, then, are the two motives of the laws of the Sabbath: the acknowledgement of creation and exodus; of God as Creator of Nature and as Lord of History.

#### The Law of the Sabbath

Let us now turn to practical, legal matters. How does Judaism structure the Sabbath law? We have two major commandments: one of them, the more important, is negative; the second ~~one~~ is positive. The negative reads: "Thou shalt not do any work (melakhah) on the Sabbath day." The positive commandment is "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." The tradition maintains that we "remember the Sabbath day" not passively, but by an active deed; it means not "remember," but "remind yourself" and remind all those in your presence to proclaim the Sabbath day. This is done by reciting the Kiddush. This Kiddush, or "sanctification" of the day, is our way of declaring why we observe the Sabbath. There is an additional Biblical concept, which we will speak of in greater length at the very end of this lecture, that of menuhah, or rest. There are yet two more additions



to the complex of the Sabbath. Both derive from Isaiah (Chap. 58). They are the precept of kibbud shabbat, the honoring of the Sabbath day, and oneg shabbat, the enjoyment of the Sabbath day. (The latter is not necessarily identical with our conception of oneg shabbat, which is a fairly modern programmatic invention rather than the original idea, although it derives from it.)

Finally, we have a Rabbinic addendum: the concept of maaseh hol, week-day activity. In addition to the technical abstention from certain kinds of melakhah (work), we must also refrain from any kind of obviously profane ~~activity~~ *conduct*.

Let us now try to analyze some of the major aspects of these constructs of Jewish law and see what we can derive from them.

### WORK

The prohibition of melakhah is by far the most significant. Now "work" means many things. There are various definitions of the term in different disciplines. To the physicist, "work" means something very definite: force times distance. "Work" for the economist means profitable labor, no matter how much or how little energy I have expended over any distance. The ordinary, lay definition of "work" differs from both. It normally implies such diverse things as straining muscles or engaging in an occupation from which I make a living. So that the conception of what "work" means is quite varied and needs precise definition in order that we may know whether or not work has been done.



The Talmud is quite <sup>precise</sup> ~~scientific~~, quite exact in its definition of melakhah. As a general rule, we would define "work" in Jewish law as that activity which causes a creative change in nature. Technically, the types of work, the types of creative changes in nature that are prohibited, are divided into 39 major categories, and in each major category is subsumed a number of minor categories. (The difference between major and minor is only one of classification, not value.)

An example of melakhah or work is: to plant a seed. If I plant a seed, I have violated the Sabbath and I am technically liable for the extreme penalty. But what have I done? Have I really worked? I just bent down and put a little seed into the earth. However, in terms of the Talmud's definition, I have worked, for I have made a creative change; I have made possible natural growth. Similarly, if I write two letters (which is the minimum to establish a violation of the Sabbath), I have through a natural act, through writing, established something which has semantic significance. I have created meaning, a message. Or if I take two pieces of <sup>cloth</sup> ~~garment~~ and I sew them together with two stitches, I have created a garment out of what was merely fabric. There are 39 such categories of creative changes we are forbidden to introduce into nature on Shabbat.

Now this is important because it has enormous metaphysical significance. It gives us Judaism's clearest insight into the relations among God, man, and world, and tells us something about man's role in his world.



Judaism does not consider man as a piece of plastic on and through whom God plays out His own destiny. Man is not just a passive recipient of what the gods determine will be his fate ~~and his destiny~~. Man was created incomplete, and when God finished His creation, He ~~did not~~ really finish the world. The world <sup>remains</sup> ~~is~~ incomplete. It is left for man to complete it. (Incidentally, this may be the major idea of berit milah, the circumcision: Man himself is born incomplete.) That man was created in order to finish the creation with God, we see at the very beginning, when upon his creation God tells him to reproduce, to fill the world, and ve'khivshuha, to conquer it. That means to take the world and settle it, civilize it, make something of it. In the very legislation of the Sabbath, before we are commanded to refrain from labor on the seventh day, we are commanded to work <sup>during</sup> ~~on~~ the <sup>six</sup> ~~sixth~~ <sup>days</sup>. "Six days shalt thou labor" <sup>implies</sup> ~~means~~ not only manual labor; just as our resting on the seventh day reflects the divine rest on the seventh day, our activities on the six days must reflect the divine activity on the six days, and that means creative activity. Our activity should be, ideally, a creative improvement of the world in which we live.

Yet this role of creator in the world can easily mislead man into the dangerous illusion that he is the sole master of the world <sup>--</sup> ~~the~~ the great delusion of modern secular man. When man gets it into his head that everything depends upon him, that he is the exclusive



sovereign over the world, he tends towards irresponsibility, because then man must answer to no one. For instance, when man's conception of private property is such that he is the absolute master, then mastery implies not only the right to use but also to abuse. Thus, in the most extreme form of capitalism, he may rightfully destroy all his territory and everything that grows on it. But if his ownership is not absolute, he also owes a debt to society and therefore he has to be a conservationist to some extent. He may not destroy his property thoroughly and forever, because it is not his completely; he does not possess the ultimate title.

Now it is also possible that all of society should be irresponsible. Society can be insane, as Erich Fromm indicated in the title of one of his books. (He gets it from Freud, in his Civilization and its Discontents, and Freud was preceded by Maimonides who, drawing on earlier Jewish sources, maintained that entire groups and all of society can go astray. Maimonides, however, like Freud 800 years later, recognized that we should never abolish madness completely, because if not for the meshuga'im the world would not progress. Neurosis can be a creative ferment.) Not only does not individual man not have absolute right to his property, neither does society as such have absolute rights over the world. God alone has the absolute right to property. Therefore man, individually and collectively, must dispose of his goods in a responsible manner, <sup>such as</sup> ~~in a manner which~~ will make him respond to God Who sets certain norms for the use of the land and the goods of the world.



How does man, co-creator with God, acknowledge that the ultimate title of the world is not his but God's? Judaism's answer is, by a symbolic renunciation of any creative activity. If God gives me the world to use and to impose my creativity upon it during the week, the way for my acknowledgement of God as ultimate Owner is the same way that our city, for instance, acknowledges that Rockefeller Center belongs to the Rockefeller family. During one day of the year it is closed off to city traffic. By withdrawing, by restricting our right to use it, we symbolically acknowledge that not we really own it, not the city, not the people, but the Rockefeller family. Similarly, one day in seven we restrict our creative imposition on the world, and we thereby acknowledge that the world is not ours, but that it belongs to One above us, to God. We are commanded to work creatively on the world for six days, like God. Lest this go to our head and obsess us with our own mastery, lest we become intoxicated with our own lordship of all things and turn irresponsible, we set aside the seventh day; on this one day, by refraining from that same creative activity, we declare that God owns the world.

#### Honor and Pleasure

Let us continue with the prophetic laws, the honoring and enjoyment of the Sabbath day. These contribute the psychological-emotional dimensions of Shabbat. Oneg means pleasure, <sup>אנן</sup> ~~What kind of~~



<sup>ordinary</sup> ~~pleasure~~ <sup>physical</sup> pleasure. <sup>is performed by eating and drinking.</sup> Oneg shabbat ~~means to eat and to drink.~~ The Sabbath is a day when you have to derive more pleasure and more satisfaction than during the week.

Kibbud shabbat, the honor of the Sabbath, means not direct physical pleasure and indulgence but the experience of anticipation, of psychological awareness. This is a commandment of the Sabbath which, interestingly, comes into effect before the Sabbath. It means that you must prepare the table with a white tablecloth, the house must be swept and cleaned, and the candles must be kindled before the Sabbath. We must enter the Sabbath in the proper spirit and orientation and not just bluster into <sup>it.</sup> ~~the Sabbath~~. We must prepare for it psychologically, become attuned to it. This psychological awareness would include other such elements such as song and dance, all the esthetic elements that heighten our awareness of the day.

But we must remember that these <sup>material,</sup> ~~esthetic~~, <sup>and</sup> ~~social,~~ <sup>psychological</sup> aspects of Shabbat are additional, secondary elements. They must never contravene the essential idea of Shabbat which is the prohibition of melakhah or work. To light a cigar and say, "Oh, I'm observing the Sabbath, because you have to enjoy the Shabbat and I enjoy a cigar," is to indulge in a weird perversion of values. Kibbud and oneg shabbat, the psychological and social aspects, were meant to enhance the Shabbat experience, the experience of holiness. They are meant to give us the ability to appreciate the spiritual element in a relaxed mood. They are not <sup>intended</sup> ~~meant~~ to teach us to be



hedonistic, <sup>to</sup> ~~It does not mean that we must~~ indulge ourselves with "pleasure" as the primary goal. That may be a very modern idea, but not particularly a Jewish one.

It would therefore be wrong, it seems to me, and really a distortion of great values, to excuse what is a desecration of the Sabbath in our Centers because one enjoys instrumental music or the sauna or the ultraviolet, artificial sunlight or whatever else it may be. Of course we must strive for Oneg shabbat, but we must never use it to undermine and to destroy the fundamental concept of Shabbat, for then we undo what the prophets tried to accomplish.

#### Profaneness

In addition, <sup>we must consider</sup> ~~I mentioned another idea,~~ a rabbinic addition to Sabbath legislation, that of maaseh hol. Maaseh means deed or act. Hol is weekday, profane. Not only must there be no melakhah, no technical work, but according to the Jewish tradition there should be no appearance of profaneness on this day. One of our great authorities, Nachmanides, once said that it is conceivable for a man who is learned to be a naval bi'reshut ha-torah, a scoundrel within the four ells of the Torah. One can manage to find his way around the labyrinthian mine-field of prohibitions in religious and moral and ethical legislation, and yet fundamentally be a thief. It is possible similarly to observe technically the Sabbath legislation and yet to have a day that will be even more weekdayish, even more profane, than



Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

The origin of this principle is the prophet Isaiah, <sup>in</sup> the same chapter in which he enunciates the precepts of Kibbud and oneg, honoring and enjoying (or delighting in) the Sabbath. "If thou turn away thy foot because of the Sabbath, from pursuing thy business on My holy day...not doing thy wonted ways, nor pursuing thy business nor speaking thereof..." (Isaiah 58:13, 14). What is Isaiah referring to? The tradition interprets him, I think, exactly as he meant it: that on Sabbath all of life must be different, its pace and tone and color and conversation. On Shabbat we must walk differently (although this may be slightly irrelevant to us moderns, for we drive or we run, but we never walk...). On Shabbat we must walk leisurely, never rush. Our speech on Shabbat should not be the speech of the whole week; it must concern neither business nor gossip. Our whole appearance <sup>and experience</sup> on Shabbat must be non-profane.

Now this admittedly is a subjective principle not given to absolutely clear criteria, but it remains a crucial aspect of Sabbath laws. Even if an act is technically permissible, it can violate the spirit of the Sabbath. And Jewish law is not literalist. It demands respect for both letter and spirit. We cannot excuse the violation of the spirit of Shabbat because we have kept the letter. For instance, we do not permit the playing of television even where it was turned on before the Sabbath, and hence the technical violation was avoided. To keep the TV on is to observe the letter but to kill the



spirit. This is self-defeating.

Equally sterile is the reverse, such as participating in an activity which violates the letter on the excuse that it upholds the spirit. For instance, to conduct an art class on Shabbat where the subject is Jewish, such as painting of Jews with beards...or a class in piano, in which the participants play only Jewish music. I leave it to <sup>those with</sup> ~~your own~~ far greater experience and more fertile imaginations to conjure up more illustrations of activities of the "Jewish spirit" in violation of the letter of Jewish law. This is fundamentally what we call antinomianism or religious lawlessness, and this is most certainly not consonant with Judaism. It does accord well with Christianity and Sabbatianism, ancient pseudo-Messianic sects in Judaism, both of which claimed fidelity to the intention, the spirit, at the expense of the letter of the law. Of course, what happened ultimately is that the entire Law was abrogated for both movements and they lost their Jewish character.

### Rest

Let us now elaborate on the last of the categories of the Sabbath, that of mehulah, or rest. The central precept of Shabbat, as <sup>we</sup> ~~I~~ mentioned before, is the refraining from indulging in melakhah, in creative changes in nature, which is the halakhic definition of "work." A corollary, however, is "rest" or menuhah. The Bible (in the second version of the Ten Commandments), says that we must observe the Sabbath "that thy man-servant and thy maid-servant may



rest as well as thou" (Deut. 5:14). This means that on Shabbat we should not work in the ordinary lay sense of the term. We should not go to our offices, we should not go to our factories, we should not go to our stores. (There are some exemptions of course. Rabbis have to preach in shul and, <sup>community politics should so decide, center workers will</sup> ~~if some of you have your way, you'll~~ have to go to the Centers <sup>on Saturday.)</sup>

Apparently, this is a purely negative act. It is a vacation, a day off. But is it really so?

Let <sup>us</sup> ~~me~~ diverge for a moment. In the beginning of the second chapter of Genesis, we read: "...on the seventh day God finished His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day..." Now, we know that God created the world in six days. But here we read that God finished His work on the seventh <sup>day</sup>. Does ~~not~~ that mean that He worked on the seventh day, that He did not rest all of the seventh day? Should it not have been written that He finished His work on the sixth day? <sup>¶</sup> As if in answer to this problem, the Rabbis tell us that when the Bible was translated into Greek (the Septuagint) -- according to a beautiful Jewish legend, it was miraculously translated identically by seventy elders of Israel, each of them working in a separate cubicle -- a certain number of deliberate changes were entered in the Septuagint. One of the most significant changes is the verse we just mentioned. The Hebrew reads, "And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had made." The Septuagint, however, records that God finished His work on the sixth day. Hence, the Greek translation eliminates our difficulty.



But then we still remain with our question: what about the Hebrew original? If the Greek translators were right, then why does the Bible in the original Hebrew have God finishing His work on the seventh day, implying that God worked <sup>at least part of</sup> on the seventh day?

Our commentators, specifically Rashi, give us an answer that seems to be only a semantic sleight of hand. He says that God did create on the seventh day. What did He create? -- bara menuhah, He created menuhah, or rest.

Now if rest is only a vacation, if it is completely negative, ~~then what sense does this make? What do they mean, God created~~ <sup>apparently</sup> rest? Rest <sup>^</sup> means you do nothing, you lie on your back and you sleep late and relax. Obviously, therefore, this definition is wrong, and menuhah has positive content. While it is not "creation" in the sense of the work of the first six days, it nevertheless <sup>entails</sup> ~~is~~ something significant and novel; <sup>hence,</sup> ~~that was done;~~ some creative act was performed by God in bringing menuhah into existence.

This the Greeks did not understand. The Greek pagan mentality couldn't grasp that menuhah, keeping away from work, from normal activity, can have a special active, dynamic, positive significance. And not only the pagan Greek could not understand it; even the Hellenistic Jew found it difficult to appreciate. Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, the greatest of all the Hellenistic Jews, <sup>in</sup> <sup>ing</sup> writes about the Sabbath, and tells us that one of the main reasons for and benefits of the Sabbath is to enable us to rest and refresh ourselves so we may have strength to work better the week following. According to



Philo, the Sabbath was given to us so that we might work more efficiently the next six days. This is almost a capitalistic dispensation: I'll let you take off one day, but get a good rest so you can produce more the next six days.

But this is not a Jewish answer. Here Philo is more Hellenist than Jew. <sup>authentically</sup> The Jewish <sup>view</sup> answer is not that the Sabbath was created for the six days, but that the six days were created for the Sabbath! The great Spanish-Jewish exegete and thinker, Don Isaac Abarbanel, who was a finance minister for one of the more undistinguished Kings of Spain, offers us a marvelous insight into the Jewish conception of the Sabbath in his commentary <sup>on</sup> in the very first word of the second chapter of Genesis. We read, va-yekhulu ha-shamayim ve'ha-aretz, "the heaven and the earth were finished." Va-yekhulu is translated as "finished." But those <sup>acquainted with</sup> of you who know Hebrew, <sup>or</sup> even Yiddish, will recognize another root ~~there~~. Va-yekhulu also comes from the word takhlit, or "purpose." In English, and also in Latin and in Greek, the same double meaning occurs. ~~In~~ <sup>Thus</sup> ~~English~~ the word "end" has two meanings: cessation, <sup>or</sup> conclusion, and also purpose, as in "means and ends." Similarly in Hebrew the word takhlit means both conclusion and purpose. Hence, va-yekhulu ha-shamayim ve'ha-aretz not only means that "heaven and earth were finished"; it also means "heaven and earth attained their takhlit, their purpose." That takhlit or purpose was: Shabbat. So do we say in our Friday night prayer: "You sanctified the seventh day,



takhlit maaseh shamayim va-aretz, as the purpose of the creation of heaven and earth." The proof text follows: va-yekhulu ha-shamayim, etc.

Clearly, then, the <sup>more</sup> genuinely ~~and authentic~~ Jewish conception is not that we have menuhah on Sabbath in order the better to work on the other days, but we work in order to rest, in order to participate in menuhah.

What is the content of menuhah, such that it makes Shabbat the purpose of the rest of the week? The answer, I believe, lies in this. Issur melakhah, the prohibition of labor, implies the cessation of our ~~creative~~ activities imposed by us as creative personalities upon the natural world. But authentic menuhah or rest requires that on the Sabbath we direct these creative changes not on nature but on ourselves, spiritually and intellectually. Menuhah is not a suspension for one day of the week of our creative talents, but a refocusing of our creative talents upon ourselves. The difference between the prohibited melakhah and the recommended menuhah lies not in the fact of creativity, but in the object of one's creative powers: whether oneself or one's environment, the inner world or the outer world.

#### The Problem of Leisure

The same idea in slightly different phrasing can give us, I <sup>submit</sup> believe, a new insight into an enormously important contemporary problem. Menuhah is, in a sense, religiously enforced leisure. It



is the available time we take away from our normal labor. If I now rephrase my question about the nature of menuhah, the problem is: is leisure to be considered negatively, time taken away from work, or positively; and if positively, how? Is this leisure-menuhah a vacuum of inactivity, or can it and should it become a higher form of activity?

The problem of leisure is of crucial importance for our society. Irwin Edman, the late professor of aesthetics at Columbia, once said that the best test of the quality of a civilization is the quality of its leisure. If you want to know what a civilization is really like, ~~don't~~ <sup>not only</sup> look at its technological and artistic production, but see how its members spend their Sundays. That will <sup>provide</sup> ~~really tell you~~ the nature of a people. Prof. Edman was anticipated in this by the Talmud, which tells us that a man's character can be tested in three ways: be'kiso, be'koso, u-ve'kaaso, by his pocket -- is he a miser or is he a spendthrift?; by his cup -- how does he respond to the temptation of alcoholic excesses?; and by his temper -- can he control himself in the presence of provocation? These three provide a guide to what kind of person a man is. But there is a fourth test according to some, a fourth <sup>index</sup> ~~critterion~~ of character or personality: af be'sahako, also by his "play," <sup>How</sup> does he use his leisure? That will tell you the real quality of a man.

The use of leisure is more than a criterion of our social health. It is a problem that must urgently be solved in order to



avoid major crises that threaten the whole structure of our society. Increasing automation, and also early retirement combined with growing longevity, are bound to make more and more time available to most of us. Now, what is going to happen with the new surplus of leisure as more and more man-hours are released from office and factory? The Southern California Research Council recently predicted that by 1985 the typical worker in the U.S.A. will have the choice of a 25-week vacation, retirement at age 38, or a 22-hour workweek. If this indeed becomes a reality in the next few years, as it shows every promise of doing, what in heaven's name will our people do with all that spare time? Cultivate the soul and mind? -- or dull their brains and fill their cranial cavities with that ceaseless flow of tripe and terror that issues from television and other channels of mass communication? Or, worse yet, will they seek the cheap thrills of social, moral, and legal delinquency?

Finally, a Jewish view of leisure should be of especial interest to Jewish Center workers whose careers are largely dedicated to servicing the Jewish community in its leisure hours.

#### Misuse of Leisure

Interestingly, the Dutch scholar Huizinga once investigated all major languages and discovered that in each of the languages he studied there were two separate words, one for work and one for play. This indicates that the concept of leisure is a universal one. Now in Hebrew we find not one but three terms for leisure, and these three terms provide us with a clue to an understanding and an analysis of our problem. Each of these three terms has a different value



and a different signification.

One of them we just mentioned: sehok, "play." The term is frequently used in Jewish literature as a euphemism for the three cardinal crimes: for unchastity, for idolatry, even for murder, in the sense of tormenting a victim. Sehok is the misuse of leisure. It indicates a debilitating kind of idleness, a useless but degenerate play, which in the Mishnah is discussed in greater length in purely legal terms. <sup>9</sup> The exact definition of sehok and its primary consequence was in dispute between two first-century Sages, R. Eliezer and R. Simeon b. Gamaliel (Ketubot 59b). The problem concerns enforced idleness (batalah) of a housewife, either because of an abundance of servants, or because her husband vowed not to benefit from her personal labors. Both Rabbis agreed that the situation is intolerable. R. Eliezer maintained that even if she has a hundred maids, she ought to do some work in the household, "for idleness leads to zimah, unchastity." R. Simeon, dealing with the latter case, where the husband vowed to abstain from benefiting from his wife's work, decrees that he must divorce her and grant her her ketubah (dowry and settlement), "for idleness leads to shi'amum." This last word, in modern Hebrew usually means "boredom"; in all probability that is its original meaning in the Mishnah. Soncino translates it as "idiocy," which is a shade too harsh a rendition of Rashi's translation of the word as shigaon. Maimonides' translation of sh'amum as behalah, which means a kind of



frightened confusion, would locate the term somewhere in between the two. Indeed, the Sages anticipated a modern discovery: boredom may lead to mental breakdown. The mind cannot long maintain its integrity if unoccupied and unstimulated. And boredom is the principle product of batalah or idleness. R. Simeon prefers divorce to such idleness or misused leisure that can only lead to gross violation to the wife's psychological integrity.

According to the Talmud (Ketubot 61b), the difference between the two Tannaim occurs in such a case where the wife spends her time at dog-races and other such "leisure" activities. Here only R. Eliezer's stricture would apply, for the element of zimah or immorality <sup>may</sup> certainly enters into the situation. R. Simeon, however, would be lenient, because as long as there is no total idleness there is no danger of shi'amum. The Talmud decides in favor of the stricter decision, that of R. Eliezer.

The sehok-misuse of leisure is thus objectionable both morally and psychologically. I remember reading about ten or fifteen years ago that some sociologist investigating the changed moral climate in England, attributed the increasing sexual itineracy of contemporary England to the reduced work-week. When there's nothing to do, you do what you ought not do.

One may add that the Rabbis knew this from a careful reading of history. They were not strangers to Imperial Rome and its social and moral patterns. And in Rome, the day's work was



usually done at noon or shortly thereafter, with the rest of the day spent in pleasure and amusement. More than half the days of the year were holidays. It is probable that the Rabbis saw a cause-and-effect relation between this excessive and misspent leisure and the immorality of Rome which they so deplored. The relation between sehok and zimah is all too obvious.

Turning now from sehok to the positive content of leisure, we find two words in Hebrew. These represent two different levels; Both are Sabbath-associated words. When the Torah describes God "resting" (which should never be taken anthropomorphically), ~~in the human sense~~, it says: shavat va-yinafash. Shavat ("He rested") is similar to the word Shabbat, and it means to refrain from work. Shevita (the noun, <sup>which</sup> in contemporary Hebrew means a strike), is a period in which we desist from work. <sup>also</sup> ~~You~~ can see the negative, passive aspect immediately. The second word is va-yinafash (noun: nofesh). This signifies another form of leisure. Va-yinafash or nofesh comes from the word nefesh: the soul, the spirit.

Hence, the concept of menuhah contains one or both of these ideas. The negative understanding of menuhah (or leisure) we may call shevita, cessation of activity. The positive we may call nofesh. <sup>We are</sup> (I am not using shevita in a pejorative sense, because both of these <sup>signify</sup> ~~are~~ proper uses of leisure.)



### Self-Expression

Shevitch means that a man cease his usual labors, and this respite from routine work activity allows him to rediscover himself by emerging from the work week. Over-involved in and overwhelmed by his set pattern of work, <sup>a</sup>man's dignity is threatened. He begins to identify himself by the functions he performs in society or family and turns into an impersonal cipher, like a beast of burden that can be just as easily replaced by another function-bearing animal that happens to be technologically efficient. By disengaging from his involv<sup>e</sup>ment with nature, with society, with business, man is permitted self-expression. His real "self" comes to the fore. He doesn't have to be busy taking dictation or selling or buying or fighting. By means of shevitch on his Sabbath day of "rest," he can start expressing the real self that lies within. Shevitch is thus the use of leisure to restore my individuality in all its integrity. By pulling out of the routine of weekday involvement, I confront myself in order to find out who I am. Leisure helps me resolve my "identity crisis." (And what self-respecting adolescent doesn't have an identity crisis? Yet, despite the fact that the term is common coin in all high schools and colleges, it can mean something.) By getting away from my normal activities, which harness me into the measured responses of a Pavlovian, completely deterministic way of acting



during the week, my inner, original ego emerges; I can re-discover myself when I <sup>am</sup> taken out of the matrix of these challenges and the responses which are expected of me. In this sense, shevifah exploits the limits of my character and my potentialities. (As we shall see shortly, it exploits them but it cannot expand them.) It is the desirable result of available time not wasted in sehok.

In practical terms, leisure is a time for games. Leisure refers not only to time, but also to the nature of the activity. You can drive a car and it is part of your work, because you are a cab-driver; but you can drive and consider it leisure. You can think and regard <sup>that</sup> ~~it~~ as work, but you can also think and feel it is a delight and a joy -- whether or not you are a taxi-driver in one case or an intellectual in the other. Leisure is a game-activity in the highest sense. We place a person in a new environment, in new conditions, allow him to bring out unsuspected skills that were heretofore latent in him, to express himself in new ways, whether of esthetics or athletics or any other way to which he is unaccustomed during the week.

### Self-Creation

From here we go to the next step, nofesh. Nofesh is more than self-discovery; it is the use of leisure for self-transformation. Paradoxically, it is in a sense more passive than shevifah. Instead of activity for the purpose of self-



expression, it may require a certain kind of personal, inner silence in which you make yourself available for a higher impression. It is the incorporation of the transcendent rather than the articulation of the immanent. You try to respond to something that comes from without, from above. Nofesh means not to fulfill yourself but to go outside yourself, to rise beyond yourself; not to discover your identity, but rather to create a new and a better identity. (Incidentally, this is my usual approach to young people who come into my office with the lament, "Rabbi, I don't know who I am." My answer is, "You probably aren't! Your job is to create an 'I', to do something in order to make a self. You're not going to find out who you are by moping, 'who am I?', and by scrutinizing your face as you look into the mirror. Your task is not to discover but to invent an I. That's the real problem.") That is what nofesh is all about. Nofesh <sup>requires of us that we</sup> ~~means to take my~~ <sup>our</sup> creative talents, which during the week are applied to impersonal Nature or unengaged society, and now turn them inwards and create a new, real self. This is the inner and deeper meaning of menuhah.

Our tradition speaks of a very interesting phenomenon concerning the Sabbath. During the week everyone has a neshamah, a soul. But on Shabbat we receive a neshamah yeterah, an "additional soul." This means, I submit, that there is some kind of undeveloped <sup>facet</sup> ~~dimension~~ of personality, a spiritual dimension, of which we remain unaware in the normal course of events. On Shabbat



(in the nofesh sense of a menuhah) we are given the time to enrich ourselves by developing or creating this spiritual dimension.

Hence, whereas shevitah implies the development of a latent, pre-existent talent, nofesh means the creation of a novelty within the personality, bringing something new in, transforming myself by growing into a neshamah veterah. The question is: how is this done? The act of shevitah, of expressing oneself, is something in which ~~all of you, as social workers,~~ are expert. The <sup>more difficult</sup> ~~higher~~-question is: how do you transcend yourself, how do you effect nofesh?

#### Study and Leisure

To this Judaism <sup>provides</sup> ~~has~~ a classical answer. There is a moral-intellectual way, and that is: the study of Torah. "The Sabbaths were given to Israel in order that they might study Torah" (Jerusalem Talmud, Sab.15:3). The Sabbath, both as a specific day and as the model of leisure, is the occasion for study.

The study of Torah should not be understood as merely the best means available to perpetuate the Jewish community. When at the beginning of our history we were commanded to study Torah, and the rabbis of the Mishnah (Peah 1:1) declared that it is the highest mitzvah, the most significant value in all of Judaism, they did not intend this as a survivalist technique for Judaism. They did not mean for us to organize an interdisciplinary group of some rabbis and some Talmudists, some philosophers and some



sociologists, some economists and some educators, in order to deliberate on how best to perpetuate the Jewish community, and then conclude that we must build more Hebrew schools. They meant that study in and of and by itself is the chief value. It is a fantastic idea that you will find in no other religion: an entire people is commanded to study not only so that they might know what to believe or how to observe, not only so that they may survive and perpetuate themselves, but because study itself has an innate value, because it is by itself the supreme value for which other things are propaedeutic, only means leading to this end. Torah is an intellectual activity informed with moral purpose and infused with religious meaning. So important is the study of Torah that one scholar of the second century, R. Ishmael (who is in this sense less extreme <sup>his controversialist</sup> than R. Simeon b. Yohai), explains that only because the Bible explicitly tells us: "...if ye shall hearken diligently unto My commandments...I will give the rain of your land in its season...that thou mayest gather in thy corn and thy wine and thine oil" (Deut. 11:13-14), are we permitted to work during the week. If not for this verse, a man would never be permitted to work, to "gather in" his "corn and wine and oil." Why not? Because he would be obliged to do only one thing all his life, namely: study Torah (Ber. 35b). For Jews, the study of Torah is not something you do when your wife pulls you to a lecture, when you take time out of your "normal" activity. Rather, what we in



our days are wont to call our "normal" activity is the time that we take off, legitimately or illegitimately, from what normative Judaism considers our major activity, namely, the study of Torah. That is why the Talmud speaks of the need for a special dispensation to engage in work other than Torah. I mention this only as a measure of the importance of the study of Torah in its broadest sense.

Hence we must attempt to find leisure <sup>expression</sup> ~~outlets~~, not only in the standard ways to which we are normally accustomed -- games, skills, aesthetics, art, song, choreography -- although this too must never be overlooked, for this is legitimate as the shevithah aspect of menuhah. But we must progress beyond this and find an outlet in the most creative activity known to Israel, namely, study. Even in the Greek scheme, intellectual development and leisure were related. The Greek word for leisure, schole, is the origin (via the Latin schola) of our word for "school." But for the Jew, intellectual development is not enough; it must be informed with a moral purpose. This is precisely what is meant by Talmud Torah. Maimonides (Hil-Talmud Torah, 1:12) divides the day into twelve hours - three for working and nine for studying. ~~I mention this not only because the idea expounded is so unusual,~~ <sup>will this appear</sup> but <sup>it is</sup> ~~as~~ an illustration of the fact that there is enough material to occupy a man's mind for a full life-time, and that Judaism sees Torah study as the Jew's major occupation. And because it is also



mitzvah, or morally-infused intellectual labor, it is more than innately worthless, time-filling "plowing of parched fields," but the kind of pursuit which can change a man's life and re-define for him, progressively, his place in the universe and his relations with his God.

### Study as a Game

Now when I recommend that we use leisure for Jewish <sup>learning,</sup> ~~scholarship,~~ I do not mean scholarship of the professional kind, the kind of education our children get in school -- which is necessary, but which is, under the best of circumstances, routinized. Perhaps, ~~and here I'm only throwing out a suggestion,~~ <sup>may have to</sup> we ~~must~~ <sup>form</sup> devise a ~~means~~ of game-oriented study. We mentioned before that the same activity can be of the nature of work or that of a game. In the history of Jewish scholarship, there is a long story of ~~the~~ reaction during the last three hundred years or so against the Talmudic methodology called pilpul, subtle dialectics (pejoratively called "hair-splitting"), the tendency to pull together disparate ideas from all corners of the earth and build difficult, abstract, and abstruse conceptual structures. Those who opposed pilpul believed more in straight and unencumbered analysis. One would be hard put to find anyone reckless enough to venture a defense, let alone advocacy, of pilpul today. But in truth, pilpul has been unfairly maligned, for this is the way the intellect "plays," the way the mind indulges in its delightful



games and exercises. I can lug cartons of dresses up seven stories, and not like what I am doing, but if I go to the gym and I do the same kind of exercise playing basketball, I enjoy it. Similarly, the mind can think along straight analytic terms and it is part of its "work," but when it relaxes and spins off ideas in the stimulating patterns of dialectic, it is a happy game, a leisure-<sup>type</sup>~~kind~~ of thinking. Perhaps we have to rediscover that technique for our own times, especially for the highest kind of leisure activity -- nofesh.

It therefore might be well, ~~I humbly submit~~ to consider this distinction in determining the nature of Center activities. The leisure-time available during weekdays -- and as time goes on <sup>it is going to increase and will</sup> ~~we're going to have more and more of it and it's going to present~~ bigger and bigger challenges to all of society, especially to ~~center workers~~ <sup>people in your profession</sup> -- provides the opportunity to emphasize the shevitah-type of activity: esthetics, song, dance, physical relaxation, and development. On Shabbat, if indeed the Center is to be open on that day (and I am deliberately avoiding this question), the kind of activity should be the nofesh-type: cognitive, meditative, cerebral, intellectual growth in Judaism in its widest aspects -- its ideas about the world, its moral judgments, its history, its folklore, its problems.

Lest there be any misinterpretation of my words, I should like to make myself clear. The concept of menuhah as I



have explained it, in the forms of shevithah and nofesh, is integral to the Sabbath experience as well as the model for a theory of leisure. But no matter how valuable it is, it always remains subordinate to the prohibition of melakhah (work) on the Sabbath. Judaism can never legitimize the subversion of the Sabbath by permitting a violation in the name of "creative leisure," of one type or the other.

### Conclusion

I will conclude by once again affirming the centrality of Shabbat. Don't judge it by the extent of its non-observance. Shabbat is more important to Jews and to Judaism than all the Jewish Centers. It is more important than the synagogues and temples. It is more important than the Temple of Solomon that stood on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, more important than the Wailing Wall which we have today. Never should it be looked at by Jews through Christian eyes, as if all of Sabbath could be condensed into a "service" for an hour and a half on Friday night or Saturday morning. It has enormous significance for man's understanding of his place in the world. In Judaism, abstract understanding is never sufficient. Ideals have to be lived, have to be acted out; there must be an empirical way of expressing a great concept. Shabbat remains the eternal covenant, the berit olam between God and Israel. Shabbat is a powerful, complex and yet delicate organism, with metaphysical, emotional, psychological, and social dimensions. I do not believe they can be separated out,



any more than you can take a human being and dissect him and then expect him to survive whole. You cannot commit an offense to any one major part of Shabbat without violating its integrity and destroying it.

Finally, what we tried to do is to show how Shabbat offers us certain insights into the problem of leisure. We differentiated between sehok, the misuse of leisure, and the two valuable aspects of menuhah: shevitah and nofesh, self-expression and self-transcendence, self-discovery and (if you will) creative self-invention.

I have purposely avoided the very real political and social problem with which you are wrestling, that of opening the Centers on Shabbat. I feel that a <sup>direct</sup> ~~clear~~ statement by me on the question, pro or con, will not really convince anyone. I would rather contribute to the ongoing debate by offering an understanding of our tradition and its relevance to our times and the issues that confront us. I do hope that I have been able to do this in some small measure.