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SABBATH REST

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The central precept of *Shabbat* 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 or our schools or our factories or our stores.

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

The significance of *menuhah* is emphasized throughout the Sabbath liturgy. Three times we pray, "Our God and God of our

fathers, be pleased with our rest (*menuhab*) . . .," as though our *menuhab* were a form of *avodat ha-Shem* as are sacrifices. Obviously we are not dealing with a mere self-indulgent vacation, anthropomorphically invoking God's maternal approval of our concern with our health. The *minhab* prayer, which celebrates the qualities of *menuhab*, concludes its central portion on this note: "...and by means of (Israel's) *menuhab*, they sanctify Thy Name." Sabbath rest is thus nothing less than a vehicle for the observance of Judaism's most illustrious precept, *kiddush ha-Shem*, "the sanctification of the divine Name." But to "sanctify the Name" means to act in such a manner, generally before Gentiles, that glory will redound to Judaism and enhance the Name (i.e., reputation) of the God of Israel in the world. Obviously we are dealing with something far more fundamental than just taking a day off from work every week. There lies within *menuhab* a concept that Jews must teach to all mankind (unlike the halakhic observance of the prohibition of *melakhah* which was covenanted just for Israel) and the appreciation of which will add to the glory of God and Torah. We are dealing, in other words, with a Jewish ideal of *universal* import and relevance. As such, its implications must extend beyond that of just relaxation.

Let us 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* day. 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?

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 on at least part of 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 menubah*, He created *menubah*, or rest.

Now if rest is only a vacation, if it is completely negative, this does not make sense. Rest apparently means you do nothing, you lie on your back and you sleep late and relax. Obviously, therefore, this definition is wrong. *Menubah* has positive content. While it is not "creation" in the sense of the work of the first six days, it nevertheless entails something significant and novel; hence, some creative act was performed by God in bringing *menubah* into existence.

This the Greeks did not understand. The Greek pagan mentality could not grasp that *menubah*, 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, in writing about the Sabbath, 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 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. The authentically Jewish view 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 on the very first word of the second chapter of Genesis. We read, *va-yekhulu ba-shamayim ve'ha-aretz*, "the heaven and the earth were finished." *Va-yekhulu* is translated as "finished." But that is not its only meaning. *Va-yekhulu* also comes from the word *takhlit*, or "purpose." In English, and also in Latin and in Greek, the same double meaning

occurs. Thus the word "end" has two meanings: cessation or conclusion, and also purpose, as in "means and ends." Similarly in Hebrew the word *takhlit* means both conclusion and purpose. Hence, *va-yekbuhu ba-shamayim ve'ba-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-yekbuhu ba-shamayim*, etc.

The same point is implied with equal cogency in the Bible commentary of the *Netziv* (R. Naftali Zevi Yehudah Berlin). Commenting on the variation between both versions of the Decalogue in the first word of the fourth commandment, *Netziv* maintains that *zakhor*, "remember" the Sabbath day, means that during the entire week we are to put aside choice provisions for the Sabbath; and *shamor*, "observe" or "keep" the Sabbath day, is its negative — that we must not fail to lay up supplies for the Sabbath during the week. Both intend, therefore, that the six days serve as preparation for the seventh. According to this we may understand the relevance of the verse, "six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, and the seventh day shall be a Sabbath for the Lord thy God..." (Deut. 5:13, 14). Work during the six days becomes a duty and a virtue because it is preparatory for the seventh day. *Shabbath* is the purpose of the whole week.

Clearly, then, the more genuinely Jewish conception is not that we have *menuhab* on Sabbath in order the better to work on the other days, but we work in order to rest, in order to participate in *menuhab*.

What is the content of *menuhab*, such that it constitutes the universal dimension of the Jewish Sabbath and that it makes *Shabbat* the purpose of the rest of the week? The answer, I believe, lies in this. *Issur melakhab*, the prohibition of labor, implies the cessation of our activities imposed by us as creative personalities upon the natural world. But authentic *menuhab* requires that on the Sabbath we direct these creative changes not on nature but on ourselves, spiritually and intellectually. *Menuhab* is not a suspension for one day of the week of our creative energies, but a refocusing of our creative talents upon ourselves. The difference between the prohibited *melakhab* and the recommended *menuhab* lies not in the fact of

creativity, but in the *object* of one's creative powers: whether one-self 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 submit, a new insight into an enormously important contemporary problem. *Menuhab* is, in a sense, religiously enforced *leisure*. It is the available time we take away from our normal labor. If we now rephrase our question about the nature of *menuhab*, the problem is: is leisure to be considered negatively, time taken away from work, or positively; and if positively, how? Is this leisure-*menuhab* 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 character of a civilization is the quality of its leisure. If you want to know what a civilization is really like, look not only at its technological and artistic production, but see how its members spend their Sundays. That will provide a more reliable criterion of 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 index of character or personality: *af be'sabako*, also by his "play" — how does he use his leisure? That will reveal the essential 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?

Misuse of Leisure

Interestingly, the Dutch scholar Huizinga once investigated all major languages and discovered that in each of those 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 within the context of *menuhab*.

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.

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 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 *shi'amum* as *behalab*, 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 *batalab* or idleness. R. Simeon prefers divorce to such idleness or misused leisure that can only lead to gross violation of 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 *zimab* or immorality may certainly enter 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 opinion, 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 itinerancy of contemporary England to the reduced work-week. When there is 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 time 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 *zimab* 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 G-d "resting" (which should never be taken anthropomorphically), it says: *shavat va-yinafash*. *Shavat* ("He rested") is similar to the word *Shabbat*, and it means to refrain from work. *Shevutah* (the noun, which in contemporary Hebrew also means a strike), is a period in which we desist from work. The negative, passive aspect is immediately evident. The second word is *va-yinafash* (noun: *nofesh*).

This signifies another form of leisure. *Ve-yinafash* or *nofesh* comes from the word *nefesh*: the soul, the spirit.

Hence, the concept of *menuhab* contains one or both of these ideas. The negative understanding of *menuhab* (or leisure) we may call *shevitah*, cessation of activity. The positive we may call *nofesh*. (We are not using *shevitah* in a pejorative sense, because both of these signify proper uses of leisure.)

Self-Expression

Shevitah means that a man ceases 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, a 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 involvement with nature, with society, with business, man is permitted self-expression. His real "self" comes to the fore. He does not have to be busy taking notes or selling or buying or fighting. By means of *shevitah* on his Sabbath day of "rest," he can start expressing the real self that lies within. *Shevitah* 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 today in all circles from junior high schools and up, 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 rediscover myself when I am taken out of the matrix of these challenges and the responses which are expected of me. In this sense, *shevitah* 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 that as work, if you are a professor or a student; but you can also think and feel it is a delight and a joy — whether or not you are a taxi-driver in the 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 *shevitah*. 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* requires of us that we take our 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 *menuhab*. It is re-creation, not relaxation.

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 suggests that there is some kind of undeveloped facet of personality, a spiritual dimension, of which we remain unaware in the normal course of events. On *Shabbat* (in the *nofesh* sense of

a *menubah*) 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 the self by growing into a *neshamah yeterah*. The question is: how is this done?

To this Judaism provides 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.