



# Sabbath & Stress

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One may think that “rest” is the essential element of the Sabbath, but this is not in fact the case. People who keep the Sabbath characterize the hours of Sabbath as “parentheses,” “a time set apart to live differently from the rest of the week,” “a pause,” “a disconnection.” These observations are interesting, for they reveal the very factors of protection against stressing events and the basic elements of therapies that are recommended to cope with stress, namely thinking of something else that is comforting. Indeed, the Sabbath is understood as a means to face the stressful problems of existence.

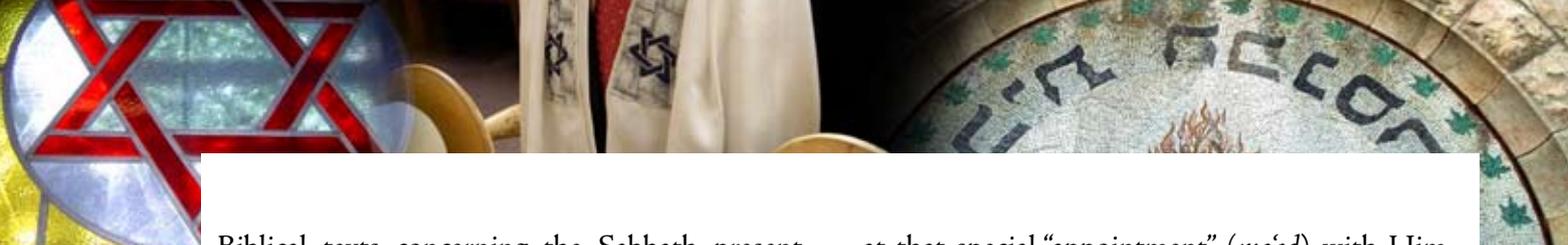
**The Sabbath takes us back to our Creator and to ourselves.**

Thus the Sabbath is viewed as a source of joy—a special moment that one longs for. The very notion of “feast” is essential here, with the candles and the festive meal at which family members gather all dressed up for the occasion. Joyful songs give an “extraordinary” atmosphere to this time. What seems to be the central conception of

the Sabbath, however, is the family. It is a time to come together not only with our family members, but also with our best friends.

The Sabbath takes us back to our Creator and to ourselves. It is a moment of silence in which the spiritual dimension can grow and blossom, a moment of prayer and meditation, a moment to distance ourselves from our busy activities and think, and a moment of freedom when we remember the event of the Exodus, the deliverance from slavery.

The concept of preparing the house and the meals (which begins long before the beginning of the Sabbath) is very important, not only because it allows us to be free on Sabbath from any work and bustle, but because it is a source of joy: we prepare ourselves to receive a Queen, and our beloved ones. It is also a source of respect. We revere the appointed time and we desire to make it beautiful and fitting.



Biblical texts concerning the Sabbath present it as a positive day of grace, a day when people cease their secular work and cast aside their daily worries, a day when their thoughts are redirected to the God above. People who keep Sabbath are invited to refresh their connection to the historical community of the Bible and their covenant with the Creator. The reading of the Bible, the Psalms, and the liturgical prayers remind us of a partnership: a people and their Creator (Exodus 20:8-11; cf. Genesis 2:1-3). Also the commemoration of the departure from Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15) provides a paradigm of divine intervention, as well as the basis for the trust in the future that is connected with the God of deliverance. The Sabbath reminds the believer of the dignity of the human person, the value of the being over the doing, the duty of not letting oneself become enslaved. The Sabbath is associated with a hope to be freed someday from our modern pharaohs, whether they represent relational, professional, or psychological dominations.

The various biblical texts insist that this “rest” is not just for ourselves, but it is also to be enjoyed by the family and other people, providing an ideal framework for the development of human relations. The Sabbath invites humans to a special calling: to enter into a relation with the Creator

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at that special “appointment” (*mo’ed*) with Him which symbolizes all the other relational “appointments.” It is also a day when we take a breath again and “restore our soul”—a day when we gather our being that has been scattered throughout the multiple demands of daily life. The Sabbath of the manna invites us to trust God, to rest mentally, and to willfully leave our worries and concerns aside. The notion of *’oneg Shabbat* (“delight of Sabbath”) invites us to consider all the pleasures granted with Creation—the pleasure of good food, but also the conjugal and spiritual pleasures, which are important elements of the essence of life.

The Sabbath day was so important that its transgression was punishable by death. Perhaps one could interpret this punishment as a natural consequence, in the long run, of what happens when humans do not consider this grace. This interpretation is suggested by Jeremiah the prophet, who associates the carrying of a burden on Sabbath with an endless fire (Jeremiah 17:27). When we do not experience a weekly Sabbath, the chronic stress of our daily lives may likewise seem to be an endless fire.

