

Like most of you, at times in my life I have suffered through the experience of losing power, usually for no more than half a day or a day at a time. Twice, when the outage looked to extend beyond a second day, we moved into a hotel or into a friend's home. Five days in our home without power or heat, without internet and email, without telephone and television, 10 days, three weeks - I can't imagine it. Here is an account of a brief time living without 20th century technology, written by someone from Hoboken, New Jersey, in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy:

By some yardsticks I am very observant, by others not so much. I go to services every Shabbat morning, light candles, keep kosher but have never been shomer Shabbat. I'm not necessarily looking to change that just now but I did notice some interesting things in the aftermath of Sandy. Like many of us, I had no heat and no power for several days – 5 in my case. It was actually quite nice having dinner with a friend by candlelight – way better than dinner on a snack table in front of the TV. Having no heat and no light were less of a problem for me than having no phone, no internet, no TV, no wi fi, and for much of the time no cell phone service either. I don't do the whole social media thing but I'm online constantly and expect to find information instantly. How many times a day do we Google this or Google that? During that week I had difficulty just finding out if my water was safe to drink. And yet, when I got power back I actually waited a day before turning my computer on. It wasn't just the onslaught that awaited me. It was also that uncomfortable as I was with the isolation and the information void, there was also something very freeing about not checking my email. So the next Shabbat I tried something new – I turned my computer off before I lit the candles and didn't turn it back on until Shabbat was over. This was a good step for me. For me unplugging opens the door to turning inward and paying attention to other things. Who knows – maybe in the future I'll try turning off another device.

Today is Yom Kippur, and it's also Shabbat. As such, it's a good time to spend some time thinking about some things that you might do to find the gift of peacefulness in your life, how you might use the Jewish concept of Shabbat to provide a framework for building a more restful life. At its core, Shabbat is about letting go of responsibility. Letting go of the responsibility to earn a living. Letting go of the responsibility to be in charge. Letting go of the responsibility of being a provider. Letting go of the responsibility of fixing things. Letting go of the responsibility of being creative, productive, living by the clock, being industrious, being a good worker.

Shabbat is about breathing, having the physical and mental space to take a breath, being able to sit and focus on one thing at a time, to be able to choose what you want to focus on, to have the freedom to tune out, to say “no thank you ...”

Shabbat is about paying attention to what your body needs, to stretch, to get some exercise, to do what your body needs to do but not necessarily demand that it do it better or do more more of it than the next person, to choose to listen to your body and give it what it wants and needs ...

Shabbat is also a time to nourish and refresh your mind, which could mean that you challenge yourself intellectually or could mean that you give it some time off and read for the pleasure of distraction, a time to engage in conversations that are not directed towards a particular resolution or outcome, conversations that establish or nourish relationships.

As I'm working through this, I'm thinking, this sounds pretty good. I need this. I wish I had a Shabbat that fulfilled all of these things, but I fall short in any number of areas. But Shabbat is a time to let go of the need for perfection. Shabbat is a time to acknowledge our imperfections and not feel inadequate or guilty about them, to remember and accept the 'good enough,' to embrace the imperfections of others without blame, to step away from the notion that it is our job to fix the world around us including the people in it.

My favorite idea about Shabbat is embedded in two words found in Exodus 31. You probably know the passage: [Ex. 31:16-17]

“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 Adonai made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He ceased from work and was refreshed.” (Exodus 31:16–17 JPS)

וְשָׁמְרוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-הַשַּׁבָּת לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתָם בְּרִית עוֹלָם: בְּיַמֵּי וּבֵין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֹת
הוּא לְעֹלָם כִּי-יִשְׁפֹּת יָמַי עָשָׂה ה' אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת וַיִּנָּפֵשׁ:

The last two Hebrew words, rendered as “He rested and was refreshed,” שָׁבַת וַיִּנָּפֵשׁ, refer to God. The word וַיִּנָּפֵשׁ comes from the noun נִפְשׁ, meaning “a breathing creature.” נִפְשׁ is often best translated as 'body,' although in post-Biblical Hebrew it can also mean soul. The name of my blog, EmbodiedTorah, comes from the verb וַיִּנָּפֵשׁ, which might mean “to be settled in one’s body,” but which I think of as “to be embodied.” By EmbodiedTorah, I mean that the result of a Jewish life is to make our lives and our bodies into a vehicle for Torah. “On the seventh day God ceased from work and took a breath/became settled in his body.” God, of course does not breathe and the idea that on Shabbat God is embodied sounds suspiciously like a theology of one of our sibling religions. The words, though, are meant to evoke an image of human beings imitating Divine behavior, even if the Divine does not engage in that particular behavior. God does not catch his breath and refresh his body, but we can. The model of Shabbat can help us to lead more peaceful lives by focusing on what it means to be embodied, to live and appreciate the beauty of this precise moment in which we exist.

Shabbat is a time to enjoy your food. Structure your evening and your day so that you are not rushed for time, so you can eat slowly and taste the food and enjoy the company. The food does not need to be gourmet. Even simple food can be Shabbat food - it's the mindset that makes a Shabbat dinner more than the elaborately prepared food.

Shabbat is a time to pay attention to the world in which we live, rather than the world which we have created. Human beings have molded and formed the world to meet our needs, and continually transform resources to suit our ongoing needs. Shabbat is a time to pull back from modifying our environment and try to catch a glimpse of God's world.

Shabbat is a state of mind, but Judaism recognizes that the way to achieve a state of mind is through rituals of the body. Judaism asks you to surrender your body's desire to control. Shabbat begins and ends at points controlled by nature, not by a human created clock. Sundown Friday to dark on Saturday. Judaism sanctifies both the beginning and the end with wine - Kiddush on Friday recognizes the beginning, and Havdalah on Saturday acknowledges the end. The hours in between are Shabbat-hours, in which you are invited to engage in activities that reinforce a Shabbat state of mind.

Mitchell Chefitz tells a wonderful parable in his book *The Curse of Blessings* about the transformative power of one's state of mind:

... The wise man sensed that he had once been angry. He couldn't remember quite why he had been angry. That he couldn't remember made him angrier still. His anger became so great, his wisdom departed. He became an ordinary man.

As an ordinary man he stood upright. He walked. He talked. But he remembered he had been wise. That he was no longer wise made him angry, so angry he ceased to be a man. He became an animal that walked on all fours.

As an animal he prowled the forest. His belly swung close to the earth. Once he had stood upright. He had walked and talked. Now he could only growl his discontent. His growling was such, he ceased to be an animal. He became a vine that climbed a tree.

As a vine it climbed and climbed, wrapping itself around trunk and branches, reaching toward the canopy of the forest. Even as it climbed, it knew once it had the freedom to roam between the trees. The vine chafed at its limitations. It ceased to be a vine. It became a plant, fixed in the ground.

As a plant it sent roots into the earth and stretched upward toward the light. As it flowered, it felt only regret it could no longer climb to the highest heights. Indignant at being stuck in the dirt, it ceased to be a plant and became a boulder.

As a boulder it sat with weight and integrity, solid and substantial. But resentment that it could no longer grow toward the light dwelled at its core. Only the resentment grew, swelling and swelling until the boulder shattered. The boulder became pebbles.

As pebbles, it became unsettled by every rain, rearranged by every storm. Though smoothed and polished by water and wind, the pebbles no longer had the integrity of a single entity. Dissatisfaction wore the pebbles down to dust.

As dust it experience nothing.

A wind lifted the dust into the atmosphere, beyond the atmosphere, into the expanse of the galaxy, into the depth of the universe. The dust floated without any awareness for the longest time.

At last, the dust settled to earth and became pebbles. Rain and wind polished the pebbles to perfection. Pleasure fused the pebbles into a boulder.

The boulder cherished its integrity. So grateful to be solid and substantial, it opened to the light. The boulder became a plant.

The plant sipped nourishment deep from the earth, reached high toward the sun. Rejoicing in its growth, the plant flowered and became a vine.

The vine embraced a tree, circling in delight. Happiness flowed from its highest point down to the ground. The vine became an animal walking on all fours.

The animal pranced and danced through the trees, so glad for the grace of movement. It stood upright to walk and found it could talk.

The man standing upright marveled at each of his limbs. In awe of every movement, he raised his voice in praise of such wonder. The man became wise.

The wise man became one with all about him - with all men and women, with all animals, with climbing vines, flowering plants, boulders, pebbles, dust, and the nothingness beneath the dust ...¹

The work week grinds us down with problems to solve but at the end of the week we can rise to become our highest, wisest selves, when we are able to put ourselves into a mindset of enjoyment and delight. Don't wait for a hurricane or winter storm to throw you back into a simpler age. Try, one day a week, to turn off the technology that ties you down and distracts you from the real community that surrounds you. Embrace [The Sabbath Manifesto](#) promoted by "Reboot," an organization of diverse Jews searching for ways to use the Shabbat hours to lessen the complexity of their lives and find a state of Shalom.

01. Avoid technology.
02. Connect with loved ones.
03. Nurture your health.
04. Get outside.
05. Avoid commerce.
06. Light candles.
07. Drink wine.
08. Eat bread.
09. Find silence.
10. Give back.

Thousands of years ago, the Divine voice in Torah shared with us the idea of Shabbat, a radical notion of time off. It remains to this day a counter-cultural statement of anti-consumerism in a world of 24/7 shopping. Rest, become whole, and give yourself the time and the gift of allowing yourself embody your highest self, the one that you want to be if only you had the time.

1. The original story ends, "... but the wise man sensed that he had once been angry. He couldn't remember quite why." This ending, which turns the story into an endless cycle, doesn't fit my point - so I left off the final sentence!