

Secret of the Sabbath

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The Sabbath is one of the great mysteries of Jewish tradition. The traditional Jew dedicates a seventh of his life in recognition of God's having rested on the seventh day of Creation; yet the Bible offers no explanation as to why God rested. The *Zohar*, the classic work of Jewish mysticism, refers to this enigma as *raza d'shabat*, the secret of the Sabbath, and suggests that it touches the very foundations of Jewish belief.¹ Indeed, the Jewish sources place the Sabbath on a level of importance higher than almost anything else in the Tora. According to the Talmud, it is "equivalent to all the commandments," and its careful observance has the power to atone even for the sin of idolatry.² Moreover, while other Jewish festivals commemorate events that took place in the history of the Jewish people, the Sabbath recalls something which can hardly be considered within the normal bounds of time and space, and is in fact entirely outside of human history. Thus while it is the Jewish people that, according to tradition, formally sanctifies the other festivals, the holiness of the Sabbath is understood to come directly from God.³

More than anything else, the Sabbath in Jewish tradition is characterized by its comprehensive ban on work (*isur melacha*). The scope of this prohibition, and the theological explanation behind it, have no parallel in the customs surrounding other holy days, either within Judaism or

without.⁴ Over the centuries, a colossal halachic structure has been raised around the prohibition of labor, relating it to nearly every facet of human life. The poet Haim Nahman Bialik, who as a youth received a classical religious education, was amazed by the “mighty spiritual work” invested in the prohibition of work in the Talmud. “There are one hundred and fifty-seven two-sided pages in tractate Sabbath, and one hundred and five in Eruvin [which also addresses laws of the Sabbath],” he wrote. “For the most part they consist of discussions and decisions on the minutiae of the thirty-nine kinds of work and their branches.... What weariness of flesh! What waste of good wits on every trifling point!” Bialik’s dismay was tempered with pride, however; he did not conceal his belief that the Sabbath was a great wonder of the Jewish spirit—“a source of life and holiness to a whole nation.”⁵

One is hard pressed to find such sentiments in popular culture today. Instead, the traditions and laws of the Sabbath are widely dismissed as oppressive or arbitrary. An example of this can be seen in an essay on the subject by the sociologist Ya’akov Melchin, writing in the Israeli journal *Yahadut Hofshit*:

The weekly day of rest was originally devoted to a range of leisure activities, including family and community cultural activities, blessing and prayer rituals, readings in poetry and rhetoric, and the study of the classical literature that is at the foundation of the Jewish cultural heritage. Over the years, restrictive commandments accumulated, developing into an oppressive Sabbath code full of rules and restrictions that get in the way of leisure and restrict the freedom of those enjoying the Sabbath as they please, violating the spirit of this unique institution, which is meant to grant maximum freedom to all, regardless of age, gender or class, that they may enjoy their free time as they see fit.⁶

Such statements are common in Jewish culture today, and reflect the gulf separating the “freethinking” view of the Sabbath, dedicated to leisure and relaxation, from that found in the traditional Jewish sources. From the traditional standpoint, the prohibition on work is not meant to establish

the value of leisure, or to protect workers from the harsh realities of capitalist society. Rather, its meaning is primarily spiritual. In some respects, the prohibition of work teaches more about the nature of Jewish faith than any other commandment.

For “work” is another name for creative or productive activity, which is the center of normal human occupation. By prohibiting this kind of activity one day in seven, Judaism draws attention to human creative effort and teaches us about its essential nature—what it means, and what it requires. In the process, it also presents an original theological teaching, concerning the share in creation assigned to man by the Creator, and man’s resultant relationship with both the world and the divine. This teaching contains two contradictory elements: For six days, man exercises his will upon the world; he then exercises restraint on the seventh. Through the proper balance between these two elements, will and restraint, man’s labor acquires a kind of meaning and purpose which are attuned to the fundamental dynamic of Creation itself.

The Sabbath, therefore, contains within it a central, ancient message about the Jewish way in the world. As we shall see, it also offers an important critique of those civilizations, including contemporary Western civilization, which have chosen other paths.

II

When the pagan scholars of the classical world learned of the practice of the Jews to cease their productive activity every seventh day, they saw it as something strange, arbitrary, even dangerous. Some saw it as proof of Jewish indolence. The Roman philosopher Seneca, for example, derided the Sabbath as a wasteful institution, in which the Jews “lose almost a seventh of their life in inactivity.”⁷

Yet Judaism taught of a far more comprehensive idea of labor, of which the “indolent” Sabbath teaching was only one element. In the Jewish sources, productive work is presented as an essential human obligation, a central pillar of man’s mission on earth. As opposed to the belief advocated by the Church in medieval times, the Tora does not see labor as a form of punishment.⁸ While it is true that the sin for which Adam was expelled from Eden brought about an increase in the difficulty involved in labor, it was still not seen as a curse. On the contrary: The engagement in productive activity, with the hardship it implies, is seen as a means of coming closer to God, through imitation of him.⁹ Just as the Eternal created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, man is similarly commanded: “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, and the seventh day is a Sabbath for the Eternal your God: You shall not do any work.” Based on this verse, the Sages determined that “just as the Tora was given as a covenant, so too was work given as a covenant.”¹⁰ This positive approach is also expressed more fully in the following midrash:

R. Shimon ben Elazar says: Even Adam tasted nothing before he worked, as it is written, “And he placed him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to keep it”; only afterward did he tell them, “Of every tree of the garden you may eat.”¹¹ R. Tarfon says: The Holy One similarly did not rest his Presence upon Israel until they had worked, as it is written, “And they should build me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.”¹² R. Yehuda ben Beteira says: If a man has no work, what should he do? If he has a fallow yard or a fallow field, he should go and work it, as it is written, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work.”¹³ . . . R. Yose says: A man dies only through idleness.¹⁴

According to the rabbis, labor occupies a crucial place in the Jewish view of proper living, one which nothing else can replace. In this spirit they taught, for example, that “the merit of labor stands where the merit of lineage cannot.”¹⁵ Even the study of Tora cannot replace work: “All study of Tora that is not combined with labor,” argues the Mishna, “ultimately comes to

nothing, and causes sin.”¹⁶ In his discussion of the rules of Tora study, Maimonides went as far as to write that “whoever decides to study Tora and not to work, but instead to live on charity, desecrates the name of God and brings the Tora into contempt, extinguishes the light of religion, brings evil upon himself and deprives himself of life in the world to come.”¹⁷

The rabbis’ emphasis on work was not simply a reflection of their abhorrence for indolence and idleness. As suggested above, the rabbis saw work as intimately related to the religious ideal of adherence (*deveikut*), that is, of man’s attempt to draw close, or “cling,” to God.¹⁸ Now, such a demand poses a serious theological difficulty for the Jew: Given the unbridgeable gulf between the Creator and his creatures, how can man “adhere” to the Eternal? The midrash suggests one possible answer: Adherence can be achieved through imitation.

R. Yehuda, son of R. Simon, began: “Walk after the Eternal your God.”¹⁹ But can a flesh-and-blood creature walk after the Holy One?... Rather, from the very beginning of his creation of the world, the Holy One was engaged first of all in planting, as it is written, “The Eternal God planted a garden in Eden.”²⁰ So should you, too, engage first of all in planting when you enter into the land.²¹

Since one can never bridge the gap between the finite and the infinite, the rabbis taught that one may instead adhere to God by simulating divine activity through earthly human labor.²² According to this view, the human being is blessed with a unique element that distinguishes him from other creatures and draws him nearer to God: The desire and ability to create. R. Haim of Volozhin, a leading rabbinical authority of the early nineteenth century, drew a connection between man’s imitation of God and his ability to create and to influence whole worlds: “Man is seen as the heart and soul of a hundred million worlds... and to him alone is given the rule of choice, to turn himself and the worlds in whatever direction he chooses.”²³ R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik makes the point more explicitly: “There is no

doubt that the term ‘image of God’... refers to man’s inner charismatic endowment as a creative being. Man’s likeness to God expresses itself in man’s striving and ability to become a creator.”²⁴ When man makes bold changes in his world to make it meet his needs and plans, his actions are a reflection of the original model of all work: The divine act of Creation.²⁵

When it first appeared, this idea of human creativity—that is, of an analogy between productive human effort and the divine act of Creation—was, in all likelihood, completely new. The pagan worldview understood human culture to be an integral part of a larger complex of nature, with its eternal rhythms, and was therefore ill-suited for anyone who saw innovation, the effort to create something that has not previously existed, as a positive ideal. Thus, for example, the Greek language lacks any verb meaning “to create.” Instead, it suffices with the verb “to make” (*poi'ein*). This approach is also reflected in the way the Greeks understood the ideal of imitation, or *mimesis*. Like the Hebrews, the Greeks believed in imitation as necessary for proper thought and conduct; yet the object of their imitation was not God, but nature. In this spirit, the philosopher Democritus wrote that “in the most important things, we have learned from [animals], spinning and mending from the spider, housebuilding from the swallow, and singing by imitation from songbirds, the swan and the nightingale.”²⁶ The Greeks believed that man must find his place in the cosmos while merging, via *mimesis*, with the eternal, objective order of the phenomenal world.²⁷ For them, the gods were merely limited entities, themselves incapable of violating the cosmic law; they certainly did not constitute a perfect model for identification and imitation. Even the gods at times engaged in mimetic activity; for example, the creation narrative cited by Plato in the “Timaeus” depicts the image of a godly but limited “demiurge” who unsuccessfully attempts to imitate the eternal ideas, which are beyond his grasp.²⁸

The biblical approach is altogether different. As against the pagan longing for union with the natural order, the Tora depicts the idea of a

sovereign, active and dynamic will, which is creative at its core. The idea of creation *ex nihilo* attests to the unlimited power and freedom of the Holy One. God is not part of a preexisting cosmos, but is rather its creator and author. The laws of nature are upstaged by the will of the divine legislator, who can break them at any time. It is the will of God, and not its derivatives, which is of foremost concern to the religious person. By imitating the Creator rather than nature, man, through acts of creativity, introduces innovations into his world, breaking free from the predetermined cycle of nature, and gaining thereby a taste of the divine freedom.

This doctrine was alien to the spirit of classical culture, the latter's impressive artistic and technical achievements notwithstanding. Even when, with the rise of Christianity, Western culture accepted the idea of *creatio ex nihilo*, creativity was still widely perceived as an exclusively divine privilege, beyond human ability. As the sixth-century Christian philosopher Cassiodorus wrote, "Things made and created differ, for we, who cannot create, make."²⁹

The idea of liberating the human spirit from its subordination to the "natural forms" began to take hold in the West only with the Renaissance. The philosophers of that period, such as Nicolaus Cusarus and Giordano Bruno, drew a distinction between created nature (*natura naturata*) and artificial nature (*natura naturans*), regarding the latter as the field in which man's creative potential would be realized, through his deliberate efforts to imitate God.³⁰ Nature no longer symbolized the limits of human ability, but its point of departure, from which nearly anything was possible. Creative labor, wrote Leonardo da Vinci, "surpasses nature in dealing with things that are simply natural and finite, for the works which our hands do at the command of our eyes are infinite."³¹

The debt owed by Western culture to Jewish theology is difficult to measure. Still, it would seem that inherent in the belief that God created the world from nothing, and that man's role is to imitate the Creator through willful works, there was always a promise of bringing to fruition those

qualities which make the human race unique. This redemptive promise, with the rejection of fatalistic naturalism that it implies, is one of the underlying assumptions of Western civilization since the Renaissance—an assumption which has played no small part in the great material and spiritual achievements of the West.

III

The Jewish doctrine of work, however, is not limited to the liberation of the will and the creativity of man's spirit. It also embodies a second, contrary dimension: That which restrains human activity, setting for it boundaries and limits. The most important expression of this in Judaism is the Sabbath.

The prohibition of labor on the Sabbath represents the other side of man's imitation of God's ways as described in Genesis: That which is manifest not in creative activity but in refraining from it. This approach is reflected not only in the commandments of the biblical and midrashic literature, but also in the great halachic corpus on the subject which has developed through the centuries. While it is easy to lose one's way in the forest of discussions, debates and homilies of generations of commentators, a close study of the halacha reveals a methodical line of thought, guided by a single fundamental principle. According to this principle, the obligation to refrain from work on the Sabbath refers precisely to that kind of creative effort which man is commanded to undertake during the rest of the week, in which he imitates his Creator through the application of his will.

This analogy between the human and the divine lies at the foundation of all the prohibitions of Sabbath labor. That this is the case can be seen from the very outset of the law's interpretation by the Sages. Due to the

Tora's laconic language (the commandment "you shall not do any work" appears with little elaboration), the rabbis of the Mishna needed a model of "work" upon which to base their understanding of the law. They found one in the account of the construction of the Tabernacle in the desert. This was due not only to the account's appearance immediately following the description of the Sabbath in the book of Exodus, but, more importantly, to the tremendous significance of the project. Aside from being the most elaborate artistic effort described in the entire Tora, it is also pregnant with spiritual meaning, described in the sources as the perfect expression of the parallel between divine creativity and human labor.³²

It is in this spirit that the Sages present the building of the Tabernacle as an express imitation of the process of Creation:

[The creation of] the Tabernacle is compared to the whole world, which is called a "tent," just as the Tabernacle is called a "tent." How so? [Regarding the first day of Creation] it is written, "In the beginning God *made*" and "He spreads forth the heavens like a *curtain*"; regarding the Tabernacle it is [similarly] written, "And you shall *make curtains* of goatskin for the tent of the Tabernacle." Regarding the second day of Creation, it is written, "Let there be an expanse... that it may *separate*..."; regarding the Tabernacle it is written, "So that the curtain shall be for you a *separation*." Regarding the third day, "Let the water beneath the heavens be gathered"; and regarding the Tabernacle, "Make a laver of copper and a stand of copper for it, for washing." Regarding the fourth day, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky"; and regarding the Tabernacle, "You shall make a lamp of pure gold." Regarding the fifth day, "and birds that fly above the earth"; and regarding the Tabernacle, "The cherubim shall have their wings spread." On the sixth day man was created; and regarding the Tabernacle [it is written], "You shall bring forward your brother Aaron." Regarding the seventh day it is written, "The heaven and the earth were *completed*"; and regarding the Tabernacle, "Thus was *completed* all the work of the Tabernacle"... Regarding the seventh day it is written, "God

completed”; and regarding the Tabernacle, “On the day that Moses *completed*.” Regarding the seventh day it is written, “And he *sanctified* it”; and regarding the Tabernacle, “And he *sanctified* it.”³³

Here the midrash draws a clear parallel between the Tabernacle and Creation, in which the building of the former culminates in a sanctification which is parallel to the Sabbath day. According to tradition, the work of building the Tabernacle was suspended on the Sabbath, not only demonstrating the supreme importance of the Sabbath prohibition, but also, more importantly for our purposes, providing the original example of human Sabbath observance.³⁴ From the kinds of work involved in constructing the Tabernacle, which were suspended on the Sabbath, the traditional teaching derived a list of thirty-nine categories of labor (*avot melacha*) prohibited on the Sabbath.³⁵ This list, which includes plowing, reaping, weaving, sewing, building, cooking and writing, as well as many other related activities, encompasses almost the entire sphere of human creativity.³⁶

To understand the prohibition of work on the Sabbath, therefore, it would be an error to consider these prohibitions independently of one another, or from a strictly mechanical point of view. Rather, what is most important about them is the particular quality they all share. The halachic literature calls this quality *melechet mahshevet*, which may be loosely translated as “workmanship.” This term has its origins in the description in the book of Exodus of the skills of Betzalel, son of Uri, the chief engineer responsible for the Tabernacle project:

And Moses said to the Israelites: The Eternal has singled out Betzalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. He has endowed him with a divine spirit of wisdom, understanding and knowledge, and with every kind of craft, and with the ability to make plans [*lahshov mahshavot*] for work in gold, silver and copper; and in the carving of stones for setting, and in the carving of wood, to perform all manner of workmanship [*melechet mahshevet*].³⁷

The different activities involved in the construction of the Tabernacle reflect the “wisdom, understanding and knowledge” which God bestowed upon Betzalel, giving him the ability to plan and execute his crafts. These qualities are together represented in the term *melechet mahshevet*, which, according to Rashi, refers to work “that the mind’s understanding considered and intended”—in other words, to labor that includes a component of will and purpose.³⁸

Melechet mahshevet, based as it is on the will, is distinguished in Jewish law from actions that involve physical labor but not the same kind of intentionality; one who performs the latter is not considered to have violated the biblical prohibition on work on the Sabbath. On this point, R. Yehiel Michel Epstein, one of the leading halachic commentators of the twentieth century (best known for his great halachic work, *Aroch Hashulhan*), contrasts the high threshold of intent required to transgress the Sabbath laws with the lower one that applies in other areas of law, such as liability law:

From the fact that the prohibition of work on the Sabbath is juxtaposed with the work of the Tabernacle, the rabbis learned from tradition that *melechet mahshevet* is required no less for [violating the prohibition of] Sabbath labor than for building the Tabernacle. Great principles and fundamental ideas are built upon this—particularly, that one must have intent for the work he is performing. If, however, he does not intend it... he is exempt from punishment. Similarly, if he was carrying a rock, and he dropped it, in the process wounding an animal [i.e., a form of forbidden labor on the Sabbath], he is exempt, because he had absolutely no intention of performing this labor. This is true even though in other areas liability may be incurred even without intent, as is the case in civil damages and other matters.³⁹

The Sabbath prohibitions are founded on the assumption of intent: If the work is not deliberate, it is not a violation of the biblical commandment.⁴⁰ This principle finds expression in a number of different conditions placed

on the prohibition. Thus, for example, one who performs work on the Sabbath is not liable if the action takes place because he was not paying attention to what he was doing, or when it is doubtful whether the results could have predictably followed from the action.⁴¹ Moreover, most halachic authorities exempt a person who engages on the Sabbath in an activity that has all the physical characteristics of a forbidden labor, but is meant to achieve a different aim. An example of this, which the Talmud calls “work not required for itself,” is provided in tractate Hagiga:

R. Abba said: One who digs a hole on the Sabbath [which is generally prohibited], but does so only for the sake of its earth, is not liable for it. According to which authority? According to R. Shimon, who said: “Work not required for itself” is exempt... for the Tora prohibited only *melechet mahshevet*.⁴²

This case describes a person who is digging on the Sabbath, in order to use the earth he has removed, rather than to create a hole. According to R. Shimon, whose opinion is accepted as law,⁴³ the digger is not in violation of the prohibition of plowing, one of the thirty-nine categories of labor. The reason for this given by most commentators is that plowing consists in the preparation of the ground for planting by digging. When one digs for a different purpose—in our case, for using the dirt—the criterion of intent has not been met.⁴⁴

The idea of *melechet mahshevet*, however, goes beyond setting subjective standards of intentionality. It also creates objective criteria for Sabbath “work.” For example, in order to perform work on the Sabbath, one must repair or otherwise improve the object acted upon. If an action is destructive in nature, even if it meets the other criteria of *melacha*, there is no violation. As Rashi writes, “Whoever damages [an object] is exempt from Sabbath violation, for it is written ‘*melechet mahshevet*.’”⁴⁵ Another example is the fact that the action must bring about a change that is meant to last. Actions that are of a temporary nature, such as the erection of a tent that is

meant to be taken down soon thereafter, or tying the kind of knot which is easily untied, are not workmanship; they are, therefore, exempt from punishment or even permitted on the Sabbath.⁴⁶

Thus *melechet mahshevet* can best be understood as a deliberate act of productive creative activity—that which combines the will to create with the actual and lasting improvement of one’s world. Here, again, the question of imitating God’s ways becomes relevant. In the view of the halacha, the “work” from which the Jew is required to desist on the seventh day is not simply strenuous activity, but precisely the type of effort which is most importantly undertaken during the week, in which the affinity between man and God is expressed.

Inherent in the concept of Sabbath rest, therefore, is the same idea of man’s imitation of God through creation which the Jewish tradition so wholly affirms during the rest of the week. By dedicating themselves to the project of building the Tabernacle in the wilderness, the Jews embraced the obligation to imitate God through the physical act of creation. At the same time, however, they took upon themselves to cease all constructive activity on the Sabbath day, as a mark of identification with God’s rest on the seventh day of Creation. In similar fashion, the Jew today imitates his Creator, in every place and time, when he engages in creative activity during the workweek and rests on the seventh day.

IV

The purpose of the Sabbath is still far from clear, however. For once we have established the importance Judaism ascribes to work in general, and especially to *melechet mahshevet*, the categorical demand to suspend it totally on the Sabbath becomes all the more difficult to accept. How can this commandment be understood, and why did it attain such a status that,

according to the Talmud, whoever observes it “becomes a partner with the Holy One, as it were, in the act of Creation”⁴⁷ The Tora itself does little to dispel the mystery. On the contrary, the idea of God’s “resting” on the seventh day presents a difficult theological problem. The Tora tells us only: “On the seventh day God finished the work which he had been doing, and he ceased on the seventh day from all the work which he had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation which he had done.”⁴⁸ The Tora offers no explanation for God’s resting on the seventh day, and by leaving it unexplained, the Tora distances itself from the pagan myths that depicted the gods as creatures with human needs, such as food, drink and sleep. These gods, as is graphically illustrated by the Babylonian flood epic, the *Atrahasis*, possessed a limited capacity for work: “When gods were men, / They did forced labor, they bore drudgery. / Great indeed was the drudgery of the gods, / The forced labor is heavy, the misery too much. . . .”⁴⁹ As against such accounts of divine weakness, the Tora stresses God’s omnipotence throughout the Creation story. The Eternal neither troubles himself nor toils. He brings the world into being through mere speech. As Isaiah puts it, “The Eternal is the Creator of the earth from end to end, he never grows faint or weary, his wisdom cannot be fathomed.”⁵⁰ Sweat and the misery of labor are the lot of the created, not of God—but God rests nonetheless.

The beginnings of a solution can be found in the recognition that the cessation of work advocated by Jewish tradition is not “rest” from toil, but a necessary, complementary part of the creative process. The “rest” which God undertakes on the seventh day was not meant for the purpose of recovery or revitalization.⁵¹ It should be seen, rather, as an aspect of the activity of Creation itself, a positive act of conclusion, signifying the completion of God’s creative enterprise. In a sense, it is God’s decision to rest that demonstrates that the project of Creation contained within itself the assumption of an endpoint. Without a clear end, Creation ceases to be an act of will, and instead takes on the features of an eternal, undifferentiated

process. Consequently, Jewish tradition mandates the celebration of the Sabbath not primarily as a day of rest, but as the culmination of a prolonged creative process, a conclusion which is not followed by any further plan or action.

The rabbinic liturgy therefore calls the Sabbath “the end [Heb., *tachlit*] of the creation of heavens and earth.”⁵² Using the word *tachlit*, which (like the English “end”) means both “conclusion” and “goal,” the prayer affirms the sense in which cessation is inherent to the creative process, signifying both its completion in time and the achievement of its aims. This idea is expressed metaphorically in Genesis Rabba:

R. Yehuda Hanasi asked R. Ishmael the son of R. Yose: Did you ever learn from your father the meaning of the verse, “On the seventh day God finished the work which he had been doing”?⁵³ . . . It is like the blacksmith who strikes the anvil with his hammer. So, too, did the Holy One lift the hammer on the sixth day, while it was still light, and then lower it on the Sabbath, once night had fallen.⁵⁴

By comparing the Sabbath to a hammer striking an anvil, the midrash is describing the Sabbath not as separate from or a reaction to the process of Creation, but as an integral part of it—even its climax. Just as the blacksmith’s effort is exerted in lifting the hammer, but the results are achieved when it is lowered, so too do the six days of divine effort achieve their purpose only on the seventh day. The *Zohar* emphasizes that “even though each of the actions was completed, the world as a whole was not perfect in its existence until the seventh day. On the seventh day, all the actions were completed, and with it the Holy One completed the world.”⁵⁵ Similarly, the midrash in Genesis Rabba posits that because God stopped his work on the Sabbath, it may be said that rest, tranquility, silence, and peace were created on that day.⁵⁶

The Sabbath is therefore not to be understood simply in negative terms. Its essence is positive, revealed through the cessation of labor. In

the Creation story, the Sabbath is the moment of silence which imparts perfection and wholeness to what has come before. R. Judah Loew of Prague, the Maharal, describes the six days of Creation as “directed” toward their completion, which is realized only on the seventh day. “The Sabbath is the completion of Creation,” he writes, “and everything is directed to its completion, which is the core of the matter. Accordingly, the entire six days of Creation are directed to the Sabbath.... For this reason, the Sabbath is to be kept in mind all week long, so that everything will be directed toward the completion of Creation.”⁵⁷ Similarly, R. Elijah of Vilna, the Vilna Gaon, concludes that a proper understanding of creative activity can be achieved only by refraining from it, “because the completion of an action is recognizable only afterwards, when there is nothing more to be done.”⁵⁸

The end of the creative process is the revelation of the product that has been added to the world, and only once the work is done can its fullness be recognized: “And God saw all that he had made, and behold, it was very good.”⁵⁹ Creativity is, therefore, not a continuity of action, but a dialogue between action and inaction, between something and nothing. The suspension of action, the halting of motion, the silencing of sound, are what give creative activity its force and meaning. T.S. Eliot captured this idea eloquently in his *Four Quartets*:

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.
Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
Not that only, but the co-existence,
Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
And the end and the beginning were always there
Before the beginning and after the end.⁶⁰

Eliot, in his quest for what he calls “the point of intersection of the timeless with time,”⁶¹ finds it in the silence and stillness that is not only the opposite of movement or speech, but their necessary complement.⁶²

There is, however, an important difference between the way this idea is applied in the divine and in the earthly spheres. The original Sabbath was a single, concluding event in the story of Creation. Once it is fixed in the temporal plane, however, it becomes part of a rhythm of human life. The recurring week replicates not only the divine rest which ended Creation, but also, as each new week emerges out of the stillness of the Sabbath, the emergence of Creation from the void on the first day. The result is a pattern of human creativity which imitates the entire process of Creation, a rhythm containing spiritual and esthetic wholeness. In order to imitate God, man must accept upon himself this rhythm, with his senses, his emotions and his thought. In this manner he discovers that inaction complements action, and that just as the Sabbath gives a sense of completion to the week that preceded it, it also bestows a kind of genetic beauty on that which follows.

The belief that creative effort should adapt itself to this fundamental rhythm is not merely a lesson in esthetics, however. It also contains a theological element, which emphasizes man’s longing to transcend the banality of endless, routine labor and direct himself to higher things. This element is represented in the revelatory character of the Sabbath experience, one example of which is the contrast between the commotion of the workweek and the quiet of the seventh day. In those communities where Sabbath observance is a public as well as a private matter, the effect is particularly intense: When, with the entrance of the Sabbath, the clamor of the street gives way to a calm that is at once alien and deeply familiar, when the pace of weekday life abruptly grinds to a halt, the psychic vacuum that results is filled by a spiritual elevation. This familiar sense of the sublime which accompanies the Sabbath is due not only to the fact that the day is cordoned off from the rest of the week, but primarily to the contrast

between them. To illustrate the point, we may recall the biblical account of the prophet Elijah's ascent to Mount Horeb:

And [the Eternal] said, "Come out, and stand on the mountain before the Eternal." And behold, the Eternal passed by: There was a great and mighty wind, splitting mountains and shattering rocks before the Eternal—but the Eternal was not in the wind. And after the wind, an earthquake—but the Eternal was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, fire—but the Eternal was not in the fire. And after the fire, a still, small voice.⁶³

A dynamic, intensifying continuity of wind, earth and fire is suddenly quelled; in the "still, small voice" which follows, the grandeur of the Eternal is revealed. If the great forces had not preceded this exalted moment, it would not have been charged with its unique power that is beyond the sensual. The silence that prevails after the hammer has struck is not simply a lack of sound. It has a positive, almost tangible presence.⁶⁴

It is to this sense which Rudolf Otto refers in his classic book *The Idea of the Holy*, where he shows how the representations of the "void" in Asian art—through darkness, silence and wide empty space—are the most effective instruments for instilling a sense of holiness. Otto then draws a similar lesson from Western liturgical music:

Even the most consummate Mass-music can only give utterance to the holiest, most numinous moment in the Mass—the moment of transubstantiation—by sinking into stillness: No mere momentary pause, but an absolute cessation of sound long enough for us to "hear the silence" itself; and no devotional moment in the whole Mass approximates in impressiveness to this "keeping silence before the Lord."⁶⁵

It is this sensation upon which the unique experience of sanctity of the Sabbath is based, made possible only by cutting off the torrential activity of the six preceding days. The sublime is revealed in the apparent void, in the

void into which every action or thought is absorbed. This is not, however, meant simply to freeze the dynamic flow of life, but to raise it to a higher plane. This is the critical moment within the rhythm of the Jewish week, for it is here that the human creative process is fashioned in true imitation of the divine Creation, the foundation of existence.

V

Thus the theology embodied in the Sabbath is based on an integration between the active and the passive, between will and restraint, in which a rhythmic balance is preserved between the two. Through the will, man acts as one created in the divine image, capable of reaching beyond his natural abilities and fashioning the world according to his own lofty designs. Through the counterpoise of restraint, man learns to recognize the consequence of his creation, to renew his appreciation for the sublime, and to adjust his designs accordingly. Judaism stresses the necessity of a balance between these two elements, attained through their proper integration in time, in imitation of the primordial model of creative effort. Without such a balance, man becomes alienated from himself and from the world in which he lives, and, consequently, also from the God who has assigned him a role on earth.

To understand what may happen to a culture lacking the proper balance between will and restraint, one need look no farther than the work-culture of the modern West, on the one hand, or of the Taoist and Buddhist East, on the other. Following Judaism, Western culture (particularly secular Western culture) recognized the power of the will to fashion the world, but largely excluded the moderating idea of restraint; the will, therefore, took on excessive and even grotesque dimensions, transforming man's desire to rule nature into an obsession that knows few bounds. Much

of Eastern culture, on the other hand, suffered from the opposite problem, building upon the idea of restraint while rejecting the idea of human willfulness; the result was a culture that often left man passive and inert.

One of the foundations of modern Western thought is the mechanistic view of nature. Descartes, for example, described the natural world as a machine lacking spirit and soul, as opposed to the human subject who thinks and feels.⁶⁶ Inspired by this conception of his surroundings, Western man's attitude toward the world became in the modern era disrespectful and exploitative, thereby inverting the ideal of the classical world: Not only did nature cease to be the object of imitation; it was reduced to the level of a resource that may be totally subordinated to man's unbridled will.⁶⁷

This change was reflected in the way work came to be viewed in contemporary culture. As opposed to the pre-modern view, which saw production as a dialogue between the craftsman and nature, modern civilization offered an approach to production in which nature played a purely functional role. This exploitative ethos eventually came to characterize not only man's relationship with nature, but also his perception of himself. Instead of taking the time now and again to halt creative activity and thereby lend it more profound meaning, Western man set for himself an often all-consuming ideal of achievement—the boundless attainment of goals, sometimes even at the expense of their careful selection. This was accompanied by the emergence in the industrialized West of what has been called “instrumental rationalism,” which judges achievement mainly through utilitarian and economic standards.⁶⁸ As a result of this approach, man has frequently found himself a slave to his own will to achieve—a development which has been devastating in its effects on his creative abilities, which actually require restraint as much as they require exercise of the will for their fruition.

The transformation of Western man into a kind of self-exploiting machine finds expression in many areas of Western life, even in its notion of leisure. Free time, and particularly the weekend, is widely seen as a means of “recharging” after a laborious week, in preparation for the next. In the process, the spiritual dimension of the Sabbath is mostly lost in favor of a

utilitarian approach that defines the “success” of leisure along lines of cost and benefit just like anything else. As the sociologist Chris Rojek has put it, “the primary purpose of rest and relaxation in leisure is to renew or increase the market value of individuals by replenishing their energies for more work or extending their capacity for more demanding labor tasks.”⁶⁹ Western man has become addicted to the heady power of the unrestrained will, and as a consequence has become to a certain degree alienated from his surroundings, and even from his own self, with all its forgotten but ever-present limitations.⁷⁰

If much of Western culture is characterized by an imbalance in favor of the will, in Eastern civilizations we are likely to find the reverse. The philosophies of Taoism and Buddhism extol not the will but restraint, or, more precisely, the defeat of the will. Broadly speaking, these cultures idealize attentiveness to and harmony with nature. They encourage man to bridge the gulf between himself and existence, and to unite with it through passive submission. “To yield,” says Lao-Tzu, “is to be preserved whole.”⁷¹

These belief systems do not see the will as valuable in its own right. They instead seek harmony between man and nature in every aspect of his worldly activity. Man must “lose himself” in the harmonious flow of nature; the ego’s desire for success is but a stumbling block on the path to negation.⁷² According to this view, man’s contact with nature must resemble nature; it must be without purposefulness, without even thought. The secret to Eastern art and craft lies in its belief that excessive thoughts, plans or desires run counter to natural reality and must therefore be overcome. This nullification of the ego finds expression, for example, in the beautiful Chinese artwork that was the envy of European artists, especially in the late nineteenth century. The greatness of this art lies primarily in its imitation of nature; this is achieved, however, not through the artist’s own personalized reaction to nature, but through the very suppression of that reaction, so as not to disrupt the flawless representation of nature.

One Eastern teaching which places particular emphasis on emptying the consciousness of aspiration and will is Zen, one of the most widespread

forms of Buddhism. In Zen this is achieved primarily through meditation, an exercise in physical and mental concentration that brings about a negation of man's will and unique personality. Instead, emphasis is placed on the minutiae of human praxis, which are seen as an integral part of the unchanging natural environment to which man must conform. In those elements of Japanese tradition influenced by Zen Buddhism (which, since its beginnings in twelfth-century Japan, has wielded long-term influence on Japanese culture), overwhelming importance is ascribed to the meticulous observance of ritual in a wide range of areas, from mundane activities such as cooking, bathing, wrapping gifts and serving tea, to the martial arts. According to the Zen approach, creative activity that expresses an individual's personality only distances him from his true goal of unification with nature. True harmony is achieved through the recurring occupation with insignificant details, which are devoid of any expression of the individual will.⁷³

The severance of the self from the content of one's labor brought these activities to a remarkable esthetic and technical level. But it also produced a culture characterized by a delegitimization of individual aspirations, the necessary result of which was cultural stagnation. The daring of the creative will, which so stirred Western civilization, languished under the traditional societies of the Far East. The stark conservatism of these societies allowed for little innovation or originality, which were seen as undermining the harmony of the natural order.

The Jewish conception of the Sabbath, therefore, represents an idea of human creativity which stands in opposition to the prevailing winds of both Eastern and Western civilization. At the same time, it integrates the salient feature of each into a careful oscillation between the two: During the week, man creates worlds, as in the West; while on the Sabbath, his creative action gives way to contemplative restraint, as in the East.

Yet, it would be a mistake to describe the seven-day sabbatical cycle as simply a synthesis of the two. The presence of each has a profound effect on the nature of the other: In the Jewish view, neither achievement nor passive unification with nature is seen as ideal. Rather, it is through the kind of

creative activity that results from the combination of the two that man achieves great things, in imitation of the Creator. By focusing exclusively on his achievements, man works for the sake of his own aggrandizement, without regard for the higher meaning of his creations, and in the end takes God's place instead of imitating him. By surrendering his will to nature's own dynamic, however, man sacrifices the "image of God" within each individual, for the sake of which he was put on earth.

The individual will thus lies at the basis of the Jewish conception of creativity. And like Western culture after the Renaissance, Judaism therefore views positively the enjoyment of labor and its fruits.⁷⁴ But in contrast to the ceaseless purposiveness of Western rationalism, the Sabbath teaches about the rhythm of all true creativity, human and divine. By directing himself to this rhythm, man learns to cast his desires into the fundamental mold of Creation. He learns to work and to rest, to go forth from himself and to return to himself.

VI

The Jewish idea of creativity, of which the Sabbath is a central pillar, gives man a unique place in the world. He is simultaneously part of Creation and outside of it. As a creature of flesh and blood, he is subject to the laws that rule the material world. As one who was created in the image of God, however, he possesses a freedom that enables him to subjugate nature to his authority. The dual aspect of humankind is expressed in the mission that God imposed upon Adam: "The Eternal God took Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to keep it."⁷⁵ When he commands man to "work" the garden, God makes him an active partner in Creation. Man's role in this context is expressed in the following midrash from Genesis Rabba:

A philosopher asked R. Hoshaya: “If circumcision is so important, why was Adam not created circumcised?” R. Hoshaya answered him: “Why did you shave the hair of your head and your beard?” The philosopher replied, “They were growing wild.” R. Hoshaya said to him: “If so, then may your eyes be gouged out and your hands cut off—for they too have grown wild!” The philosopher asked him: “Aren’t you going a bit far?” R. Hoshaya answered: “I cannot offer you a decisive answer, but I can say this: Everything was created in need of improvement. Mustard requires sweetening, as does the lupine, and wheat requires grinding—so even man requires correction.”⁷⁶

According to R. Hoshaya, nature is not a perfect creation, and its improvement is an obligation cast upon mankind. This is not meant as an indictment of the quality of God’s works, but rather as a statement about the fundamental continuity between God’s works and those of man in the world—that man’s task is, in essence, to complete the process of Creation which God began.

Still, Adam was required not only to work the garden, but also to “keep” it. Man is the custodian of Creation, and has a responsibility toward it. He must treat it as a precious charge, which can be spoiled if his arrogance is not kept in check. As the midrash explains:

When the Holy One created Adam, he took him and went around with him to all the trees of the Garden of Eden, and he said to him: “Look at my works, how fine and excellent they are. All that I created, I created for you. Make certain not to spoil or destroy my world, for if you do, there is no one to repair it after you.”⁷⁷

This view of man’s place in the universe finds its most important expression in Judaism in the Sabbath, and the balance it implies between “working” and “keeping” the garden that is our world. Genesis Rabba makes this connection explicit, by comparing the verbs employed in the verse, “He placed him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to keep it” with those of

the account of the Sabbath of Creation: “He placed him [*vayaniheihu*]—similarly, he gave him the commandment of the Sabbath, as it is written, ‘And he rested [*vayannah*] on the seventh day.’ ‘To *work* it’—‘Six days you shall *work*.’ ‘And to *keep* it’—‘*Keep* the Sabbath day.’”⁷⁸ The midrash poses a balance between will and restraint, between the urge to change and fashion the world and the need to listen, to open oneself to the intonations of earthly existence. “The Sabbath day. From every direction light, in every corner a spark. The symbol of revelation,” writes Franz Rosenzweig. “The Israelite soul looks into apertures of nature and sees the light of God bursting forth from within it. The Israelite soul looks into the apertures of life and acknowledges its role, its mission, and its obligation.”⁷⁹

The secret of the Sabbath is inherent in the Jewish obligation to identify with and adhere to God. It teaches of man’s place in the world, and his responsibility to strike a balance between the two fundamentals of his nature: Between his material and finite being, on the one hand, and the creative vitality given him by God, on the other. Such a balance enables man to transcend nature and take part in the exalted. It contains within it the promise of healing the rift between man and the world, and between the created and the Creator.

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Notes

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1. *Zohar*, Truma, 164. Cf. Sanhedrin 58b: “Resh Lakish said: If an idolater observes the day of rest, he is liable for the death penalty, as it is said: ‘Day and night they shall not cease.’”

More than any other aspect of Jewish law, the Sabbath expresses God’s covenant with Israel: “Speak to the Israelites and say: Still, you must keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout the ages, that you may know that I, the Eternal, have chosen you.” Exodus 31:13.

2. “R. Hiya bar Aba said, in the name of R. Yohanan: Whoever observes the Sabbath properly, even an idolater in the generation of Enosh, is forgiven, as it is written: ‘Happy is the man [*enosb*] who does this... who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it [*m’halelo*]’ (Isaiah 56:2)—do not read ‘*m’halelo*,’ but ‘*mahul lo* [he is forgiven].” Shabbat 118b.

3. The difference between the sanctity of the Sabbath and that of the other festivals is clearly expressed in the formulation of the blessing sanctifying each day. On the Sabbath, it is concluded with the words: “Blessed are you, Eternal, who sanctifies the Sabbath,” while on the holidays this blessing ends with the words: “Blessed are you, Eternal, who sanctifies Israel and the seasons.” Brachot 49a. According to the rabbis, this difference reflects the divine source of the sanctity of the Sabbath, inter alia, because the determination of the Sabbath is not dependent upon humans, while the determination of the holidays is dependent upon the proclamation of the beginning of each month, which in Jewish tradition is determined in accordance with the decision of the Sanhedrin. Psahim 117b.

4. The sanctified days of rest of Christianity and Islam—traditions that are inspired by the Jewish Sabbath—also are distinguished from it on this decisive point. Friday, which is sacred to Muslims as *yom al-jum’a*, is consecrated for prayer, but work is not prohibited on it. The Christian Sunday, on the other hand, is a day of rest from work, but this is generally not for the reasons that the Tora presents for the demand to cease from work; rather, the main reason for the Christian day of rest is to free time for religious rites and prayers. Exceptional in this context are the English Puritans and the Seventh-Day Adventists, who copied the Sabbath commandment almost in its entirety (the former applying it on Sundays, while the latter moving it to Saturdays).

5. Haim Nahman Bialik, *Halacha and Agada* (London: Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland, 1944), p. 12.

6. Ya’akov Melchin, “The Sabbath Laws Against Cultural Communities?” *Yahadut Hofshit* 19, Spring 2000, p. 7.

7. This position appears in his book *Belief and Prayer*, of which no known copies remain; we instead rely on the citations of Augustine. Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1998), p. 264. In a similar spirit, Tacitus noted that the Jews “say that they first chose to rest on the seventh day because that day ended their toils; but after a time they were led by the charms of indolence to give over the seventh year as well to inactivity.” See Tacitus, *The Histories*, in *Tacitus in Five Volumes*, trans. C.H. Moore (Cambridge: Harvard, 1958), vol. iii, p. 181. Especially virulent is the statement by the poet Rutilius Namatianus, who wrote in the fifth century that if Judea had not been conquered by Pompey and Titus, the plague of the “ignoble sloth” of the Sabbath would have spread throughout the Empire. Peter Schafer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes Towards the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1997), pp. 87-88.

8. The historian Aharon Gurevich writes on this subject: “In man’s obligation to labor the Church saw both the result of his imperfection and a striking manifestation of it. As long as Adam and Eve were in paradise they were in a state of innocence and took no thought for their sustenance. The Fall entailed divine retribution; now man would have to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, and Adam was expelled from the Garden of Eden to till the earth from which he had been made.” Aharon Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, trans. G.L. Campbell (London: Routledge, 1985), pp. 259-260.

9. Cf. Amos Frisch, *The Biblical View of Labor* (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hame’uhad, 1999), p. 30. [Hebrew]

10. Exodus 20:8-9. Avot D’rabi Natan, ch. 11.

11. Genesis 2:15-16.

12. Exodus 25:8.

13. Exodus 20:9.

14. Avot D’rabi Natan, ch. 11.

15. Genesis Rabba 74:12; see also Midrash Tanhuma, Vayetze 13.

16. Mishna Avot 2:2.

17. Maimonides, *Mishneh Tora*, Laws of Tora Study 3:10.

18. “Follow the Eternal your God, and revere him; observe his commandments, and heed his voice; worship him, and adhere to him.” Deuteronomy 13:5.

19. Deuteronomy 13:5.

20. Genesis 2:8.

21. Leviticus Rabba 25:3.

22. Cf. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “And You Shall Search from There,” in *Halachic Man: Revealed and Hidden* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1979), p. 180. [Hebrew]

23. R. Haim of Volozhin, *Nefesh Habaim* 1:7.

24. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), p. 12.

25. With regard to the quality of this labor, there is obviously a world of difference between God and his creatures. God is the supreme Craftsman, who created the universe *ex nihilo*; while man has to work from existing raw materials. However, in his attempt to imprint his vision on nature and thereby give his materials form, he resembles his Creator in his ability to fashion reality in accordance with his own designs.

26. Plutarch, *On the Rationality of Animals*, in C.C.W. Taylor, trans., *The Atomists: Leucippus and Democritus* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1999), p. 147. Aristotle raises a similar argument in *The Physics*: “Indeed, as a general proposition, the arts either, on the basis of Nature, carry things further than Nature can, or they imitate Nature.” Aristotle, *The Physics*, trans. Philip H. Wicksteed (Cambridge: Harvard, 1963), vol. i, p. 173.

27. Jean-Marc Ferry, “Ancient, Modern, and Contemporary,” in Mark Lilla, ed., *New French Thought: Political Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton, 1994), p. 136.

28. Plato, “Timaeus,” in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, eds. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, trans. A.E. Taylor (Princeton: Princeton, 1961), pp. 1158-1161.

29. Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics*, trans. Christopher Kasparek (Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1980), p. 247.

30. Tatarkiewicz, *History*, pp. 247-248.

31. Leonardo da Vinci, *Treatise on Painting*, trans. A. Philip McMahon (Princeton: Princeton, 1956), vol. i, p. 23.

32. An echo of this tradition is heard in Mechilta D’rabi Ishmael, Vayak’hel. Cf. also Rashi on Beitza 13b; Zvachim 47a.

33. Numbers Rabba 12:13. The verses cited are, respectively: Genesis 1:1; Genesis 1:6; Exodus 26:33; Genesis 1:9; Exodus 30:18; Genesis 1:14; Exodus 25:31; Genesis 1:20; Exodus 25:20; Exodus 28:1; Genesis 2:1; Exodus 39:32; Genesis 2:2; Numbers 7:1; Genesis 2:3; Numbers 7:1.

34. Mechilta, beginning of Vayak’hel. Cf. Yevamot 6a: “One might think that the building of the Temple overrides the Sabbath. Scripture therefore teaches: ‘You shall keep my Sabbaths and venerate my sanctuary’ (Leviticus 19:30)—all of

you are obligated to honor me.” See also Rashi and Nahmanides on Exodus 35:2; as well as Nahmanides on Exodus 31:13, s.v. *ah et shabbotai tishmoru*.

35. According to the Talmud, “The categories of labor are forty less one. R. Hanina bar Hama said to them: These correspond to the types of labor in the Tabernacle.” Therefore: “Liability is incurred [for a Sabbath labor prohibition] only for a labor of the kind that was performed in the Tabernacle. They sowed, therefore, you may not sow. They reaped, therefore, you may not reap. They carried boards up from the ground to the wagon, therefore, you may not carry from a public domain to a private domain. They lowered the boards from the wagon to the ground, therefore, you may not carry from a private domain to a public domain. They transported from one wagon to another, therefore, you may not carry from one private domain to another.” Shabbat 49b.

36. The halacha distinguishes between *avot melacha* (categories of labor) and *toledot melacha* (derivatives), both of which are considered to be forbidden under the biblical prohibition. A labor is considered to be an *av melacha* if it is one of the types of work involved in the construction of the Tabernacle, or if it resembles one of these labors in the purpose of the action and in the means with which it is performed. A labor is considered to be a *toledat melacha* if it is similar in purpose to one of the types of work involved in the construction of the Tabernacle, but is performed by different means, or if it is similar in the manner in which the act of labor is performed.

37. Exodus 35:30-33.

38. Rashi on Hagiga 10b.

39. *Aroch Hashulhan*, Laws of the Sabbath 242:20.

40. A terminological comment should be made here regarding the terms “liable” (*hayav*), “exempt” (*patur*) and “permitted” (*mutar*). The halacha contains two levels of law, that of the laws of the Tora itself and that of the decrees and regulations enacted throughout the generations by the rabbinical authorities, which are considered to have a lower standing. In halachic language, the term “liable” refers to a violation of the biblical law and its attendant sanctions. “Exempt” relates to an action that does not violate the biblical law, and therefore is exempt from biblical sanction; this term, however, is understood to imply that the act is nonetheless prohibited on the rabbinical level. “Permitted” actions, in contrast, are not considered a violation on any level. Since it is my intention in this essay to present the meaning of the term “labor” as a biblical concept bound up in the original idea of the Sabbath, our interest is in the biblical law—that is, in those actions which are considered “work” and are therefore liable, as opposed to those which are not considered “work” and are therefore exempt or permitted. Cf. Maimonides, *Mishneh Tora*, Laws of the Sabbath 1:2-4.

41. Maimonides, *Mishneh Tora*, Laws of the Sabbath 1:8; 1:5.

42. Hagiga 10a-b.

43. Most of the medieval authorities ruled in accordance with R. Shimon, except for Maimonides, who finds the digger liable for using the earth, in accordance with the position of R. Yehuda.

44. Cf. Tosafot on Psahim 47b; see also the commentary of R. Joseph Karo, the *Kesef Mishneh* on Maimonides, *Mishneh Tora*, Laws of the Sabbath 1:7. Rashi's commentary on the Talmud makes this point very clear. See Rashi on Shabbat 12a.

45. Rashi on Sanhedrin 84b.

46. Maimonides, *Mishneh Tora*, Laws of the Sabbath 22:27; 10:1. See note 40 above.

47. "Rabba—some said it was R. Yehoshua ben Levi—said: Even if one prays alone on the Sabbath night, he must recite the prayer of '[The heaven and the earth] were completed,' for as R. Hamnuna said, Whoever prays on the Sabbath night and recites '[The heaven and the earth] were finished' is regarded by Scripture as one who becomes a partner with the Holy One, as it were, in the act of Creation, for it is said, 'vayechulu [they were completed]'; do not read 'vayechulu' but 'vayechalu [and they (that is, God and man together) completed].'" Shabbat 119b.

48. Genesis 2:2-3.

49. Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda: CDL Press, 1996), vol. 1, p. 161.

50. Isaiah 40:28.

51. Saadia Gaon related to this issue when he drew a parallel between the verses "and he rested [*vayanab*] on the seventh day" (Exodus 20:11) and "and he ceased [*vayishbot*] on the seventh day" (Genesis 2:2). According to his interpretation, the two expressions have the same meaning, that of the cessation of activity: "The Scriptures do, indeed, characterize the positive and negative acts of creation by saying: 'And God made' (Genesis 1:7), 'And he rested' (Genesis 2:2). However, just as the 'And he made' was effected without motion or exertion, consisting only of the production of the thing created, so undoubtedly, when it is said, 'And he rested,' it was not relaxation from any kind of motion or exertion. It constituted merely the discontinuance of the production of what was to be created. Even though, then, the Scriptures say of God, 'And he rested' (Exodus 20:11), it means nothing further than that he discontinued his work of creation and production." Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale, 1948), p. 128.

Maimonides, based on other biblical verses, reaches the same conclusion. With regard to the verse in I Samuel 25:9: “[David’s young men] went and delivered this message to Nabal in the name of David, and then stopped [*vayanuhu*]...” he interprets *vayanuhu* to mean that they “refrained from speech,” noting that “in the preceding verses there is no mention of their being tired in any way.... In this sense it is likewise said: ‘And he reposed [*vayanah*] on the seventh day.’” Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963), pp. 161-162.

The Vilna Gaon comments on the verse, “On the seventh day God finished the work which he had been doing, and he ceased on the seventh day from all the work which he had done,” (Genesis 2:2) that “‘ceasing’ is stated with regard to the completion of work, which is the moment after the action is finished.” Vilna Gaon, *Aderet Eliahu*, Genesis, s.v. *yom hashishi*.

52. From the traditional prayerbook, in the silent devotion of the Sabbath evening service. R. Isaac Arama clarifies this point: “The Sages, who instituted the prayers, disagreed on the interpretation of the first of the Sabbath prayers: ‘You sanctified the seventh day for the sake of your name, the end [*tachlit*] of the creation of heavens and earth’—You made it the actual purpose... it seems that they interpreted the wording ‘God completed [*vayechal*]’ in the sense of a willed purpose [*tachlit*]... for it is the desired end.” R. Isaac Arama, *Akedat Yitzhak*, Genesis 4.

53. Genesis 2:2.

54. Genesis Rabba 10:9.

55. *Zohar*, Pekudei, 45.

56. Genesis Rabba 10:9.

57. Maharal, *Gevurot Hashem*, ch. 39.

58. Vilna Gaon, *Aderet Eliahu*, Genesis, s.v. *yom hashishi*. A similar idea, drafted in terms borrowed from craftsmanship, is expressed by the midrash in Genesis Rabba 10:9.

59. Genesis 1:31.

60. T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), p. 12.

61. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, p. 32.

62. Cf. Wang Zhaowen, “Art Appreciation as Recreation,” in Zhu Liyuan and Gene Blocker, eds., *Contemporary Chinese Aesthetics* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), p. 99.

63. I Kings 19:11-12.

64. Chinese music attempts to arouse similar feelings. One of the few Western scholars who had the fortune of studying the Chinese classic tradition before it was lost in the Cultural Revolution relates that “the music of the seven-stringed zither tends constantly towards imagined sounds: A vibrato is prolonged long after all audible sound has ceased.... In the hands of an older generation the instrument tends to be used to suggest, rather than to produce, sounds.” Quoted in David Tame, *The Secret Power of Music: The Transformation of Self and Society through Musical Energy* (Wellingborough: Aquarian, 1988), p. 51.

65. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford, 1958), p. 70.

66. Rene Descartes, *A Discourse on Method* (Letchwort: Temple Press, 1924), pp. 26-53.

67. Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 307-341.

68. The sociologists of the Frankfurt school, who articulated this point in the 1940s, showed how this phenomenon affected almost all aspects of modern life. In a world that adopts this form of thought, the worth of an activity is measured by its ability to yield results for which a rational calculation is applicable. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1972).

69. Chris Rojek, *Leisure and Culture* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 37.

70. The criticism of the neo-Marxists clearly goes too far, as it presents the individual as possessing only economic worth, but its basic argument cannot be disregarded.

71. *The Way of Lao-Tzu (Tao-Te Ching)*, trans. Wing-Tsit Chan (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), p. 139. In expressing this point with respect to Chinese belief, Ben-Ami Scharfstein has written: “Suspending your thought’ about matters without painful correlation means to be subject to ‘inactive’ spontaneous activity, for which the Taoists so compellingly argued, on the grounds of its inherent healthfulness and charm. One should not trouble Nature with artificial and human designs.” Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *The Artist in World Culture* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1970), p. 123. [Hebrew]

72. Scharfstein, *The Artist in World Culture*, p. 123.

73. Ben-Ami Shiloni, *Traditional Japan: Culture and History* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1995), pp. 102-108. [Hebrew]

74. “R. Hiya bar Ami said in the name of Ula: A person who lives from the labor of his hands is greater than one who fears Heaven. For regarding the one who fears Heaven, it is said: ‘Happy is the man who fears the Eternal’ (Psalms 112:1), while with regard to him who lives from the labor of his hands, it is said: ‘You shall enjoy the fruit of your labors; you shall be happy and you shall prosper’ (Psalms 128:2). ‘You shall be happy’ in this world, ‘and you shall prosper’ in the world to come.” Brachot 8a.

75. Genesis 2:15.

76. Genesis Rabba 11:6.

77. Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:1.

78. Genesis Rabba 16:5. Verses quoted are Genesis 2:15; Exodus 20:11; Genesis 2:15; Exodus 20:9; Genesis 2:15; Deuteronomy 5:12.

79. Franz Rosenzweig, “The Secret of the Sabbath,” in Franz Rosenzweig, *The Book of the Sabbath*, ed. H.N. Bialik (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1952), p. 539. [Hebrew]