Shabbat Version 2.0: Upgrading Sacred Time

Shabbat Sermon - Temple Sholom, Vancouver BC Canada

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Last shabbat I was sitting at one of our kiddush lunch tables, in conversation with one of you and I shared that after we finished, instead of my usual shabbat routine of going home, walking the dog and then taking a shabbos nap I was headed to Ableside park to go fishing for salmon off the beach.

The congregant asked, without any accusation or disrespect, “Rabbi, is that allowed, can you go fishing on shabbat?”

I am so grateful for the question, not only because it gives me the opportunity to give this sermon, to explain in a modern context what I believe shabbat is and can be, but more importantly that the individual, who I deeply like and admire, felt comfortable asking the question in the first place.

It's through questioning that we expand our thinking and crystalize our values, and whether my answer is the same as they would give for themselves is not the point, that they care enough about their own Jewish practice to explore if something they encounter fits within their own definition of shabbat observance, that they have a working definition of shabbat observance was inspiring and affirming for me as both their rabbi and a fellow Jew.

So that there is no ambiguity, I truly love, admire and respect this individual, and I truly love this question and hope they and all of you will inquire and grapple and reason and wrestle with more and more of them. How can we claim something to be important to us if we don’t care enough about it to do it in a meaningful and intentional way? We can’t and we shouldn’t.

Our tradition isn’t afraid of questions—in fact, it’s built on them. The Talmud is one long conversation of people asking, challenging, reinterpreting, and trying again. Shabbat itself is not a fixed artifact—it’s a living practice, one we inherit and shape in every generation. The moment we stop asking, stop probing, stop wrestling with how to live a Jewish life in this world, we risk letting our rituals become hollow, disconnected from who we really are. But when we ask—especially from a place of curiosity and care—we bring the tradition alive. We honor it by engaging with it. And in doing so, we remind ourselves: Shabbat isn’t something we simply observe. It’s something we co-create.

I’ll get to my answer to the fishing question in a moment, but first a bit of a broader context.

Our lives are crazy. We live in a 24/7/365 world—constant notifications, round-the-clock availability, on-demand everything. We can DoorDash dinner, stream anything at any hour, and check our email from the top of a mountain. We have instant access to everything… except our own souls.

So here we are on Shabbat, and maybe the better question isn’t “How do we observe this day?” but “Do we even know how to stop?”

If ever a generation needed Shabbat—truly needed it—it’s this one.

Shabbat is the original Jewish operating system. It was Version 1.0, written into the code of creation itself:

"And on the seventh day, God ceased from all work…"

But that was a long time ago.

That version of Shabbat was written for farmers. For people who lived in tight-knit communities, where Friday meant kneading dough, cleaning the floors, lighting oil lamps—and then resting.

Today, Friday is still a workday. Saturday is for Costco and kids. And Sunday? That's for catching up on all the things we didn't do Friday or Saturday.

So maybe it's time for an upgrade. Shabbat Version 2.0

What is Shabbat Version 2.0?

It's not about **<u>when</u>** you stop. It's about that you stop **<u>at all</u>**.

It's not about Friday night candlelight and linen tablecloths, though those are beautiful. It's about making sacred time—time that you choose to set apart, to unplug, to listen, to be.

Shabbat 2.0 is an act of spiritual resistance. It's choosing to live by a sacred **rhythm**, not an **algorithm**.

It's giving yourself permission to step off the treadmill of productivity and ask a different question: What does my soul need?

For some, it's coming here to pray and sing.

For others, it's a family walk, a quiet read, an hour without screens.

For me, it's the one day I don't go near my computer. I unplug from the world and plug into myself. This time of year, if I have the *koyach,* the energy, after a long week, it's time to go fishing.

That's Shabbat 2.0: sacred time reimagined for a world that forgot how to stop, how to rest.

Let's name the guilt. Modern Jews tend to treat Shabbat like we treat the dentist. We know it's good for us. We're always glad we went. But most of us only show up when something hurts—or when there's a milestone on the calendar, like a yahrzeit or a B'nai Mitzvah.

I could, and should say present company excluded, I'm preaching if not to the choir, then certainly the congregation as you're here and most of you are here every week, but still it is incumbent to inquire within ourselves from time to time, why? Why are we here, and is this the extent of it? Is our sabbath showing up for services and egg salad and then back to the grind or do we do as I so often challenge myself and all of us to do, take what we do in synagogue and practice it outside these doors, in our lives, our community, our relationships?

This kind of questioning—and reframing and **reforming**—isn't new. 150 years ago, **Reform** Judaism saw this happening and tried moving services to Sunday. The result? People didn't show up then either. Why? Because Sunday didn't feel like Jewish time.

What this proved most of all is that Shabbat isn't just a day on the calendar—it's a spiritual muscle. The more you use it, the stronger it gets. The more you neglect it, the more it weakens. The good news? Like going back to the gym, you can start again anytime. It's never too late to reboot. Just make sure to stretch a little first—God forbid you pull a spiritual hamstring—which, of course, isn't kosher in at least two ways.

So what does this all mean—what is Shabbat in a world like ours, with rhythms and obligations so different from the ones our ancestors knew?

Not as a list of "can't-do's":

- Can't drive.
- Can't use my phone.
- Can't cook.

That's not our Judaism. Reform Judaism says: Holiness is what you choose to elevate. What you sanctify with intention.

Shabbat can be:

- A picnic in the park where phones stay in the bag.
- A game night with your kids.
- A walk on the beach where you remember how to breathe.
- A meal with friends where no one rushes, and everyone feels seen.
- Yes—even fishing for salmon on a beautiful, clear day at a Vancouver beach.

You don't need a rabbi to bless it. You bless it by deciding it matters.

Yes, it would be beautiful if we could all stop together on Friday nights or Saturday mornings. Indeed for those of us here, we are and we do. *Hinei mah tov umanaiym shevet achim gam yachad*, how beautiful it is that we sit here together. But the most important thing isn't when you do it, or even who you do it with, though who is I think more important than when, what's most important is that you do it at all.

In Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 2:4, Rav Hillel says: "Do not say: 'When I have free time, I will study,' for you may never have free time." This rabbi says, "Don't wait for the calendar to tell you when to be holy. Claim sacred time in the life you actually live."

If not Friday, make it Wednesday.
If not a whole day, start with an hour.
If not candles, start with quiet.
We don't need more guilt. We need more permission.
Permission to stop.
Permission to rest.
Permission to reconnect—with ourselves, with our loved ones, with God.

So go home and ask yourself: What could sacred time look like in my life? In our life? What would it take to make Shabbat not just a tradition I remember—but a rhythm I live? A rhythm that resists the algorithm.

Try it. Talk about it. Make it real.

It may just be the upgrade your soul's been waiting for.

Shabbat Shalom.