

Meditation for Mar. 30

"Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to Someone Else."

This opening statement comes from the pen of Susannah Heschel, quoting her father, Abraham Joshua Heschel, in the Introduction to his book, "The Sabbath."

Of course, Mr. Heschel is referring to the Jewish Sabbath, or Shabbat, which falls on Saturday, but his concerns about the waning importance of this special day should be as much a concern for Christians as for Jews. I am sure we can all relate back to a time when the Sabbath was truly a day of rest; a day when most retail commerce was shut down, and people could lay down their tools of toil, visit friends and family, and lay aside the concerns of the previous six days. However, as we got into the 1980's, commerce was chipping away at it; initially, stores in communities dependent on tourism were the first to fall, and then it was only a matter of time before all stores were open on Sundays. *"Yet our victories have come to resemble defeats. In spite of our triumphs, we have fallen victims to the work of our hands; it is as if the forces we have conquered have conquered us."*

"The Sabbath is the most precious gift mankind has received from the treasure house of God. All week we think: The spirit is too far away, and we succumb to spiritual absenteeism, or at best we pray: Send us a little of Thy spirit. On the Sabbath the spirit stands and pleads: Accept all excellence from me."

My English-born maternal grandparents, who lived only a short distance down the street from us, were both raised in the Church of England; my grandmother in Chesham in Buckinghamshire and my grandfather in London. However, the Baptist Church was just around the corner, so for me in my early years, the Sabbath started with Sunday School. Part way through the morning we would join the adults upstairs in church, to listen to Rev. Duncan's sleep-inspiring sermons. Quite often the afternoons would be taken up with visits to or from family or friends: If on my mother's side, it would be tea in my grandmother's wonderful English garden. If on my father's side, it was one of the family farms, where I was the designated crank-turner on the cream separator.

“The seventh day is the armistice in man’s cruel struggle for existence, a truce in all conflicts, peace between man and man, man and nature, peace within man; a day on which handling money is considered a desecration, on which man avows his independence of that which is the world’s chief idol. The seventh day is the exodus from tension, the liberation of man from his own muddiness, the installation of man as a sovereign in the world of time.”

It is a sad fact that for the most part, the Sabbath, whether it be Jewish or Christian, has fallen by the wayside; swept aside by a society that lives at such a frenetic pace, driven by the daily struggle just trying to make ends meet, with no time or thought given to taking a breather and putting those concerns on the shelf for a day.

“We usually think that the earth is our mother, that time is money and profit our mate. The seventh day is a reminder that God is our father, that time is life and the spirit our mate.”

Brian Reis