

# Appreciating Everydayness through the Sabbath: An Open Pathway

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## Abstract

This article addresses our disconnect from the Sabbath and the everyday aspects of our daily lives. In our modern world, we neglect the Sabbath and the everyday. Through our industrial and technological cultures, our striving toward progress and material wealth hides the meaning we seek in our daily lives. The article describes the everyday in the context of the Sabbath. However, the article is not limited to a particular religion or any religion. The article's purpose is to open the ideas of the Sabbath to everyone so that more people may value the everyday aspects of their lives. This research suggests that greater awareness and participation in the Sabbath can lead to an appreciation of our everyday lives and enable meaningful experiences. The research considers literature in the context of everydayness. Accordingly, it employs literature that references our daily lives, or that could be twined into the structure of the everyday. The article describes the everydayness of our daily lives and how everydayness enables us to flourish. It shows how we neglect the Sabbath and everydayness in our hectic world. The article also discusses how the respite and rhythm of the Sabbath benefit us. Lastly, a reading depicts the close association of the Sabbath and our everyday lives. The reading is an example of participating in the Sabbath and suggests that such an engagement can lead toward greater awareness of the everyday.

**Keywords:** Sabbath, everyday, flourishing, culture, sacred, everydayness, Heschel

## 1. Introduction

This article addresses our disconnect from the Sabbath and the everyday aspects of our daily

lives. In the hectic modern world in which we live, it is easy to overlook the Sabbath and the everyday (Swoboda, 2018, p. 5). We neglect the everydayness of the sounds of rain pattering upon the window and leaves whispering in the wind. In our industrial and technological cultures, the meaning we seek in our lives has been cloaked by our striving toward progress and material wealth (Swoboda, 2018, pp. 5-6). The result is that we often feel that our lives have little to no meaning (Lombardo, 2017, p. 54).

The article describes the everyday in the context of the Sabbath, which is regarded as a religious day but also a day that delineates work, leisure, and rest. (McCrossen, 2000, p. 1). However, the article is not confined to Judaism, Christianity, or any religion for that matter. The purpose of the article is to open the ideas of the Sabbath to every person, regardless of their religion, and even if they do not follow a religion. The article does not use terms such as secular to describe the reader since such terms can be complex and distract us from the task of examining the everyday and the Sabbath (Calhoun et al., 2011, pp. 8, 14, 18). Here, this article is focused on all people and their various ways of living, whether religious or not. Hopefully, this path opens the value of the Sabbath to more people so they may gain a greater appreciation of the everyday aspects of their own lives.

This research aims to show that greater awareness and participation in the Sabbath can lead to an appreciation of our everyday lives and enable meaningful experiences. The objectives of this research are: to investigate the concept of the everyday, identify the importance of the everyday, explore the Sabbath in the context of the everyday, examine our neglect of the Sabbath and the everyday, and explore how we can participate better in the Sabbath and appreciate the everyday aspects of our lives. The research considers literature in the context of everydayness. Accordingly, it employs literature that references our daily lives or that could be woven into the fabric of the everyday.

This article begins by describing the everydayness of our daily lives. It shows how the everyday aspects of our lives are important and how we flourish in these everyday aspects. It then discusses the Sabbath in the context of our daily lives and how the Sabbath is a time of respite and has a rhythm that can benefit us. Next, the article shows how we neglect the Sabbath and the everyday in our hurried modern world. Lastly, the article offers a reading that depicts the close association between the Sabbath and our daily lives. The reading is an avenue of participating in the Sabbath and suggests how that engagement can lead toward greater awareness of the everyday. In our busy lives, taking breaks to notice the gloriousness of the everyday can be challenging. Hopefully, this article provides an easier path toward those moments of respite.

## **2. Places of Everydayness**

The everyday is all around us, yet we often do not notice it. However, there has been a quiet movement toward a focus on our everyday lives. We can see evidence of that movement in social and cultural studies (Gardiner, 2000, p. 2) and contemporary poetry (Epstein, 2016, p. 47). An interesting insight appears in our slight shift toward the everyday. What emerges is that our ancient mythologies, which supposedly are no longer relevant to our world, were tied to our everyday lives. A connection between our mythologies and our daily lives is described

by Armstrong (2005, pp. 5-6):

When people spoke of the divine, they were usually talking about an aspect of the mundane. The very existence of the gods was inseparable from that of a storm, a sea, a river, or from those powerful human emotions - love, rage or sexual passion - that seemed momentarily to lift men and women onto a different plane of existence so that they saw the world with new eyes.

We have similar experiences with the movies we watch and the literature we read. They also take us to a different place and enable us to see ourselves and the world anew. However, the connection between the divine and our everyday lives is not obvious, although the tie between our beliefs and ordinary lives still exists. In other words, our ordinary world connects to the sacred, which enables the sacred to make sense to us (Byrne, 1991, p. 25). The Aboriginal people of Australia are an example of this connection. They retain a sacred connection to their everyday lives through their mythologies:

We are inclined to say that when the Arunta go hunting they mime the exploits of the first and archetypal hunter, but this distinguishes them from their archetype too sharply. It is better to say that they enter the mold of their archetype so completely that each becomes the First Hunter, no distinction remains. Similarly for other activities, from basket weaving to lovemaking. (Smith, 1961, p. 367)

Smith's description shows that the Arunta employ the archetype in the activities of their everyday lives. They adopt the characteristics of the archetype, and in this way, it shapes their actions and experiences. Moreover, it enhances the Arunta's experience of their everyday world. Interestingly, the meaningful experiences we seek in our modern day are available to the Arunta through their mythologies. Smith remarks that when the Arunta act outside of an archetypal mode, their lives become meaningless:

Only while they are conforming their actions to the model of some archetype hero do the Arunta feel that they are truly alive, for in those roles they are immortal. The occasions on which they slip from such molds are quite meaningless, for time immediately devours those occasions and reduces them to nothingness. (Smith, 1961, p. 367)

The meaninglessness that arises when the Arunta do not employ their mythologies is familiar. In our own daily lives, we also know times of meaninglessness. We experience them in our mundane moments of waiting for a bus and standing in line at a coffee shop.

### **3. The Importance of the Everyday**

We may not realize that the everydayness of our lives is valuable. Everyday activities such as driving to work and picking up groceries are important because they allow us to put food on the table. However, there is more to these mundane activities because they reside where we live and value our lives. These everyday activities are also where we appreciate our daily lives through spaces of contemplation (Volf, 2017, pp. 60-61).

The everyday is so twined with our daily living that it is difficult to see and often taken for granted. However, as Pink (2012, p. 143) describes, the everyday is the "centre of human

existence, the essence of who we are and our location in the world.” Looking deeper into our daily lives, we can see meaning even in simple objects. Saito (2013, pp. 243-244) suggests that we can understand our world better when we consider where and how those objects were created. It is clear that the everyday is where our homes, families, and friends exist. Henri Lefebvre highlights these everyday aspects as crucial to our lives in his book *Critique of Everyday Life*:

Thus bit by bit there is a growing conviction that in one sense lavish institutions and grandiose ideas were façades – theatrical costumes. On the almost stagnant waters of everyday life there have been mirages, phosphorescent ripples. These illusions were not without results, since to achieve results was their very *raison d’être*. And yet, where is genuine reality to be found? Where do the genuine changes take place? In the unmysterious depths of everyday life! (Lefebvre, 2014, pp. 157)

As Lefebvre remarks, our real lives and real change occur in the everydayness of our living. Furthermore, acknowledging the everyday enables us to be aware of and accept the present moment. Being in the everyday brings benefits to our inner selves and how we approach the world around us (Suereth, 2023, p. 83). Attention to the everyday brings awareness and enables us to accept the present moment, which is rich with the matter of real living. For Merton (2012, pp. 40-41), it is the place of the potentiality of our human growth.

#### **4. We Flourish in the Everyday**

We seek distractions that will rescue us from the agonizing boredom of our everyday lives. Accordingly, we become charmed by the latest technologies and celebrities in our world of consumption. We long for these diversions because they keep us from sinking in a pool of mundanity.

In our quest for ever more distractions, we may overlook the benefits of being immersed in the ordinary. In a sense, it is the ordinary that enables us to flourish. Volf remarks that flourishing is "the life that is lived well, the life that goes well, and the life that feels good—all three together, inextricably intertwined" (Volf, 2017, para. 1). We may think it is odd to believe that we flourish in a life of ordinariness, yet our ordinary world is rich and deep with meaning.

Of course, we live in the everyday, and the everyday is where we are human. Creating an interesting synthesis, Volf adds religion to the everyday and our humanness. In an analogy, he suggests that cooking shows are not popular due to famous chefs but because ordinary people cook daily. Because of the human necessity of daily cooking, the activities of cooking ordinary meals become human moments. Similarly, religions prosper not because of priests or ministers but because religions have a connection to our ordinary human activities (Volf, 2017, pp. 60-61).

Volf suggests that our work is also a place of flourishing. We may not notice that we can flourish at work because workplaces often feel detached from our human growth. However, Volf closely connects work and flourishing. “We work in order to make flourishing possible, but things are at their best when we also flourish as we work” (Volf, 2017, p. 16).

Flourishing also has a connection to creativity and reflection. Creativity is essential when finding detours from road closures and cooking dinner with limited ingredients. These everyday actions seem mundane, yet they are significant in our human lives because much of our daily living occurs in those creative spaces (Conner et al., 2018, pp. 186-187). In an interesting way, everyday creativity and flourishing inform each other. For example, studies suggest that we prosper in everyday creativity. Conversely, we are more creative in environments that cultivate our well-being (Smith et al., 2022, p. 473). Reflection is also connected to flourishing because reflective practice verifies that our pathways are the right direction for us. Stuerzenhofecker (2015, pp. 159-160) suggests that such a reflective practice requires a space of self-care. Interestingly, this self-care also enables flourishing to emerge.

### **5. The Sabbath in Our Daily Lives**

The Sabbath is a day of rest, a respite from the hardships of work and the challenges of our social world. It enables Jews and Christians freedom from work and worries (Ringwald, 2007, p. 246). Based on biblical accounts, it has been an essential component of Western culture for over three thousand years when the Israelites arrived in Canaan and were already observing the Sabbath (Ringwald, 2007, p. 32).

The Sabbath keeps surviving in our history and has been passed through generations because it provides benefits. It provides spaces of equality and opportunity for every person weekly to halt work. It is a benefit that can be priceless (Ringwald, 2007, p. 209). In a way, we can look at Sabbath laws in the Bible as one of the first enactments of labor rights. Without these rights, we would be pushed aside by waves of industry and technology agendas (Lowery, 2021, p. 1346).

The Sabbath brings benefits to our daily lives. Through these benefits, we become less stressed and can focus on personal avenues that are best for us. For example, the Sabbath can help relieve weekly tension by halting our constant striving to attain goals, status, and material goods. It can reduce anxiety by alleviating our concerns about social positions, what others think about us, and what we think about ourselves (Dawn, 1989, p. 23).

The Sabbath also is a check of our direction and actions. It reminds us that we are human, often go in the wrong direction, and sometimes act contrary to our best interests. In our path of human development, the Sabbath enables the transformation needed to become the humans we envision (Rademacher, 2021, p. 8). In short, the Sabbath illuminates its importance simply in our observance of it.

Resolutions arise through the Sabbath because it enables us to view the world with new eyes. Tensions from home, work, and social struggles subside in a respite from constant competition and positioning (Ringwald, 2007, p. 252). We not only relinquish control of work, but we also ease our expectations and our striving toward material wealth (Ringwald, 2007, p. 247). Most importantly, Sabbath traditions provide avenues of human worth and dignity. These traditions emphasize that people are inherently valuable regardless of gender, social status, and physical ability (Lowery, 2021, pp. 1373-1374).

An intriguing aspect of the Sabbath is that it is closely twined with the days surrounding it

(Ringwald, 2007, p. 238; Baab, 2005, p. 116). For example, the week's activities lead us toward the Sabbath such that our actions inform our thoughts, feelings, and meals on that day (Dawn, 1989, p. 164). Yet, the converse also occurs because the Sabbath affects how we take our meals and perform activities throughout the week.

This two-way connection creates a rhythm of Sabbath and non-Sabbath days. Though, another rhythm also arises based on the Sabbath day's regularity. In this rhythm, it is not the day on which the Sabbath occurs that is important because it could occur on any day. Instead, the importance is the cadence of the Sabbath—it occurs in a regular tempo that is known and expected. It is a tempo of a day of observance, the days that lead up to it, and the days that come afterward. We are aware of these days, and we expect them. We anticipate the arising of the Sabbath through them, and in this expectation, this anticipation of the day of rest without labor and striving, we feel a rhythm. It is a rhythm that gives meaning to our days and lives (Dawn, 1989, p. 7).

## **6. We Neglect the Sabbath and the Everyday**

In our present-day world, we have become dissatisfied with our lives. We look for meaning but cannot find it in our modern spaces of work, play, and rest. We cannot find the meaning we seek because places of meaning have been cloaked by our ceaseless movement toward progress and the accumulation of status and material goods (Swoboda, 2018, pp. 5-6).

The workplace drives some of the forfeiture of the meaning we seek. Global markets have become more demanding in our world of competition. These markets push workers, parents, and families, to work longer hours for less pay (Brown & Lauder, 2012, p. 51; Lowery, 2021, p. 1347). The result is that many people are reaching a breaking point from being overworked, debt-ridden, and burned-out (Chabot, 2018, pp. 3-4; Suñer-Soler & Grau, 2013, pp. 11-12).

In our demanding world of modern pressures, the Sabbath offers a release from stress, overwork, and spiritual starvation (Lowery, 2021, p. 1375). Yet, we fail to notice the respite that the Sabbath offers and the benefits it provides.

Some of the reduced emphasis on the Sabbath may come from the very churches where the Sabbath is observed. According to Swoboda (2018, p. 5), Sabbath practices have been neglected by churches which now follow the rhythms of industry and technology in our progress-oriented society. Here, churches no longer connect to congregations and families. Instead, churches follow the tempo of industry and technology and diminish the respite of the Sabbath in favor of production and consumption. Swoboda's view suggests that the places where we observe the Sabbath and where respite arises have subordinated the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is meant to be a ceasing of work, a break in our laboring over the large problems and the small nuisances in our daily lives. Yet we have minimized our customs of meals with friends and family, shortened our religious services, and hidden the respite we seek. Not only have we subordinated the Sabbath, but we have also depreciated the meaning in our daily lives (Lombardo, 2017, p. 54).

The Sabbath is intended as a day of activities that free us from labor and our striving toward

accomplishment. However, we do not cease our work and struggle. Even when we are away from the workplace, we still labor to do what needs to be done in the house and out in the yard. It is an unending spiral of labor and worry that offers no escape (Dawn, 1989, p. 5).

In our persistent toil we have neglected the Sabbath, we have also disregarded the everyday. Yet, the everyday is more than cooking ordinary meals and driving to the store. It is where we play, work, and flourish. When we neglect the everyday, we ignore where we live and grow.

Our culture of consumption seems to drive us away from what is important to us. Our craving for material goods and commercial consumption diverts us from appreciating friends and family (Dyrness, 2011, pp. 30-31). We create a distance that separates us from an awareness of ourselves and our world. In short, we become unaware of the everyday. Kabat-Zinn (2005, p. 20) remarks that losing our awareness of the present moment situates us in the past and causes us to grasp at a future of fantasies. The result may be poor choices based on old stereotypes and ungrounded fears of our unknown future (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 19).

## **7. Appreciating the Everyday through the Sabbath**

The Jewish rabbi and theologian, Abraham Joshua Heschel, describes a Sabbath of family, tradition, life, passing, and sacredness. It is about our everyday living. For Heschel, the Sabbath is a day of rest, a day set apart, a day of the ordinary and the mundane, yet also a day of joy:

The Sabbath comes like a caress, wiping away fear, sorrow and somber memories. It is already night when joy begins, when a beautifying surplus of soul visits our mortal bones and lingers on. (Heschel, 2005, p. 72)

Though the Sabbath occurs only once a week, it enables us to focus on each day as preparation leads toward it, and labor returns afterward. The Sabbath is a focus of contemplation and enables us to become more aware of our everyday activities. However, the Sabbath is also an illumination of time. Each day is a step toward the Sabbath, and each Sabbath is a celebration of time:

The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. (Heschel, 2005, pp. 19-20)

However, this celebration of time is more than a duration. It is also an extension of everydayness into a cyclical week. As Smith-Gabai and Ludwig (2011, p. 350) describe it, “in a way the Jewish people have regulated their lives to a cycle of time that is founded by the weekly Sabbath.”

Intriguingly, the Sabbath extends time even further. For the Jewish people, the Sabbath reaches through past generations and into generations to come. As Hirsch (1911, pp. 92-93) describes, “the Sabbath is the sanctuary of every Jew, the Sabbath is the covenant to be preserved throughout all generations.” Heschel describes a similar extension of time into generations:

Every Jew is bound to bear the eternal light. The soul of man is called a light. Thus do we live in every generation. We derive our sustenance from one another. Just as one candle lights another and suffers no loss, so does a Jew draw renewed power from his fellow men and teachers. (Heschel, 1966, p. 204)

In the passing of the generational light, Heschel describes the bond that arises. “The real bond between two generations is the insights they share, the appreciation they have in common, the moments of inner experience in which they meet” (Heschel, 1966, p. 83).

In his book, *The Sabbath* (Heschel, 2005), Abraham Heschel’s daughter, Susannah Heschel, an author and professor of Jewish Studies, composed the Introduction and gave us a glimpse of their bond:

When my father raised his kiddush cup on Friday evenings, closed his eyes, and chanted the prayer sanctifying the wine, I always felt a rush of emotion. As he chanted with an old, sacred family melody, he blessed the wine and the Sabbath with his prayer, and I also felt he was blessing my life and that of everyone at the table. I treasured those moments. (Heschel, 2005, p. 3)

It is an up-close and personal glance of the Sabbath in their home, and later Susannah Heschel writes about her father’s passing:

On my father’s last Shabbat we had a wonderful dinner with many friends, after which one of our guests read aloud some of my father’s Yiddish poems, written when he was a young man. He went to sleep that night and never woke. In Jewish tradition, dying in one’s sleep is called a kiss of God, and dying on the Sabbath is a gift that is merited by piety. For the pious person, my father once wrote, it is a privilege to die. (Heschel, 2005, p. 11)

In some ways, the Sabbath is a prelude to paradise:

The gains for which the battle of the week is fought, separate men according to the amount which each one acquires. Not all are successful in the struggle, and there is infinite variety in the results achieved. But the treasures of paradise which the Sabbath dispenses the peace, the divine bliss, the repose, these are granted to all in equally rich abundance. (Hirsch, 1911, p. 24)

It is a paradise that comes from the needs, desires, and work in our everyday lives. However, the Sabbath and the paradise Hirsch suggests are different for each of us. Each one of us lives our own lives. That is, we have our own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. We also have our own needs; accordingly, we approach and celebrate the Sabbath differently (Mudge, 2018, p. 266; Ringwald, 2007, p. 221; Sanders, 2002, p. 210; Smith-Gabai & Ludwig, 2011, p. 352; Speedling, 2019, pp. 1383-1385).

Similarly, the paradise we seek is different for each of us. It arises through our everyday lives — through our desires and joys. In our daily living, we can see the variations of hopes and dreams that people have in their lives. In her introduction, we can see Susannah Heschel’s description of her father’s association with paradise:

For my father, the question is how to perceive that holiness: not how much to observe, but how to observe. Strict adherence to the laws regulating Sabbath observance doesn't suffice; the goal is creating the Sabbath as a foretaste of paradise. The Sabbath is a metaphor for paradise and a testimony to God's presence. (Heschel, 2005, pp. 10-11)

Abraham Joshua Heschel infused his Sabbath with family and a focus on how it should be observed. In a sense, he created a prelude of paradise that spans generations and instills a way of observance. It is a paradise that continues through his passing and that his daughter Susannah Heschel carries as an everyday light through a bond of generations.

In this depiction of the Sabbath and everyday living, Heschel does not directly describe the concept of everydayness. However, he does offer us an appreciation of the everyday by portraying facets of the Sabbath in his own daily life. In this way, we can see the Sabbath in the context of everydayness, from a vantage point that is personal and real.

## 8. Conclusion

This article began with a discussion of the everyday, why the everyday is essential, and how we flourish in the everyday. It then described the Sabbath in our daily lives and how we neglect the Sabbath and the everyday. Lastly, it depicted an appreciation of the everyday through the Sabbath of Joshua Heschel.

Based on this analysis, there are benefits to appreciating the everydayness in our lives. These benefits include being more aware of the moments in our day and finding meaning in our everyday actions. Benefits also arise in participating in the Sabbath. The Sabbath brings respite from our hurried modern world. Interestingly, the Sabbath also brings meaning to everyday aspects of our lives through the rhythms of the Sabbath and other days of the week.

A connection exists between the Sabbath and everydayness. The days before the Sabbath focus on the simple chores leading up to it, while the Sabbath day is the joy of ordinary activities. As we saw in the depiction of Heschel's daily living, the Sabbath is twined with our everyday lives. Through greater participation in the Sabbath, we can become more appreciative of the everydayness in our lives and find the meaning we have been seeking in our modern world.

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