

The Significance of Shabbes

Contributed by [Custom & Craft](#)

Source: Prepared by Bennett Muraskin, Jewish Cultural School and Society

*The lengthy week is at an end,
And with it work and weekday woe,
Encircled by family and friend,
We step back from time's endless flow.
For all who toil deserve to rest,
And all who sow deserve to reap,
To benefit from all life's best,
And to partake in Shabbes peace.*

Though literally Shabbes means rest, traditionally, Shabbes is much more than a day of rest for Jews. It is a day of spiritual and cultural renewal. It is a day of experiencing family and the shared heritage of peoplehood. It is a day for Jewish learning. It is also an appreciation of freedom, for only a free person has the luxury of choosing not to work.

Naomi Praver Kadar, Shabbes (Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring)

Shabbes reminds us that our bodies belong to us and that physical, intellectual and emotional pleasures are to be enjoyed. We need roses as well as bread. We are also reminded that our families and friends have a special place in our lives. Shabbes is a symbol of both our freedom and our humanity.

adapted from Judith Seid, We Rejoice in our Heritage: Home Rituals for Secular Jews

However, too many of us still lack this freedom. We find ourselves working long hours and weekends. We receive far less vacation time than required to maintain good mental and physical health. The next selection, written over sixty years ago, shows that we still have a long way to go to achieve the essential precondition for a fulfilling Shabbes.

The most beautiful of the Jewish holy days is the Sabbath, the holiday with social significance, when for the first time, the idea of the right to rest was proclaimed for the slave and for the worker—a right which is much more important than the world-renowned "right to work" with which so many utopians hoped to solve the problems of society. Humanity still does not have the right to rest, and will never have it, until the foundations of life are rebuilt in accordance with the principles of social justice. It should be a source of pride to Jews that the first kernels of that idea were planted in its prophetic literature. - *Chaim Zhitlovsky (1855-1943), philosopher of Jewish secularism and founder of Yiddish cultural schools in the United States*