Living Religions of the World

Experiential Journal Prompt: Design Your Own Sabbath

It is safe to say that, at least until very recently, the vast majority of Jews and Christians have observed what is called a *Shabbat* or “Sabbath” day each week. This practice is rooted in one of the creation stories or “cosmogonies” in *Genesis,* the first book of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. In that story, God creates the cosmos in six days and then rests on the seventh. This day of rest has been seen as holy, and has been observed in various ways by different groups. Whatever the details of the Sabbath—whether it is observed on Saturday or Sunday, whether it is marked by worship, or study, or by refraining from work—it has been a fixture in the rhythm of the calendar for centuries in these cultures. Many people remark that this practice has become less prominent, as stores and businesses now stay open on weekends and even on holidays. However, there has been a recent resurgence in the idea of observing some kind of special day, coming from religious and secular sources alike. (See William Powers’ Hamlet’s Blackberry, or [www.sabbathmanifesto.org](http://www.sabbathmanifesto.org), or Thich Nhat Hanh’s Present Moment Wonderful Moment)

As a personal experiment, each person will design and observe his/her own Sabbath day of rest:

1. Think about what would constitute a challenging, and yet realistic, Sabbath day. Could you plan ahead in order to spend a whole day without doing school work? If that is too difficult, is there some other way you could mark this day as special? Could you spend a day away from electronic devices? Could you spend a day or half a day in a natural setting? Could you devote a day to another person, such as a grandmother or sibling? Is there a religious service or practice you would like to attend? (e.g., church, synagogue, yoga class).
2. In your journal, write down the rules of your Sabbath. What is the time frame? (e.g., sunrise to sunset). What are you *allowed* to do? What are you *not* allowed to do? What are you *encouraged* to do?
3. Wait until the day after the experience and then write about it. Describe what you did and why you did it. Did your Sabbath meet your expectations? What did you observe? What did you learn? What would your life be like if you forced yourself to disengage from your everyday responsibilities and concerns occasionally or regularly? How would it change your view of yourself and your life? Why do you think such a practice has endured for so long?