

# Meanings of the Sabbath Revisited: Time and Space, Presence and Dwelling

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**ABSTRACT:** The seventh day of creation is the day of the Presence, the day of God's dwelling with the created world. The Sabbath becomes the reverberation of this reality. However, are there levels of access that can be discerned in the sabbatical experience? Regarding the Sabbath as sacred time, we can distinguish at least two levels or stages of proximity, one general and the other one special. These stages can be delineated more precisely if we first identify them in space before tracing them in time. Thus, starting off from the general *stage of the Presence* and further building on it, both *the meeting* and *the fellowship* comprise together the superior, ultimate stage – the Holy Grail of the sabbatical experience. The full experience that is referred to is expressed in the text in terms of “rest.”

**KEYWORDS:** seventh day, Sabbath, Presence, meeting, fellowship, rest

## Introduction

This study is the second part of my research about the significance of the Sabbath in the Hebrew Bible. In the first one I analyzed and interpreted the foundational text that provides us the meaning of the seventh day of creation, Gen. 2:1-3. The main conclusion of the previous research was that the seventh day is *the time of the Presence*, when the Creator stays with his creation, after finishing His work. The seventh day is not just the first day of creation being fully operational, but firstly the day of the creation's work being finalized. On the seventh day, God joins this time-space framework, completing His work: God *is* the content of the seventh day. God's continuing Presence with creation sets the scene for a relationship between God and the world and, in a special sense, between God and the human being.

In this study we shall explore the dimensions of this relationship, that are expressed both in the spatial and in the temporal coordinate. First, we will analyze the elements of space referring to the Presence, to find the levels on which this relationship is expressed and secondly, we will look for these levels in the temporal dimension, with relevance for the Sabbath – our theme of interest. (All the biblical texts are given in my translation, unless indicated otherwise).

## 1. Presence, meeting and fellowship

The seventh day introduces us to a general level or stage of proximity, corresponding to the entrance of the divine into a relationship with the world – *the stage of the presence*, that testifies for the dwelling or the remaining of the divine Presence with creation. Beginning with the Garden of Eden, we are introduced into a closer stage of this relationship, which has the (hu)man in focus, as representative of creation and the singular being capable of entering into dialogue with God. This is *the meeting stage*, and it implies certain limits and specific features. This setting also becomes the environment where the final stage of the relationship is attained – *the fellowship stage*. Starting from those stages, first observed in the spatial coordinates, we will explore the links between the Sabbath and the Presence, tracing them in the temporal coordinates.

It is important to state that the identifying three proximity stages is somehow subjective and didactic: subjective because they are relevant only for the relationship between God and

humans, and didactic because one can say that they are actually two, the meeting and the fellowship being aspects of the same stage of maximum proximity, and they could not exist apart from each other. Yet, I considered that for this discussion it is relevant to separate them in three, although sometimes they will be dealt with together.

### *1.1. The stage of the Presence*

From the Creator's perspective, creation becomes, from the seventh day on, a permanent locus of the divine Presence and thus of the holiness, seen in its relational dimension. The portrayal of creation as a dwelling of the divine King shows up in the interpretations of the late Jewish literature (Freedman and Maurice 1939, 340). The identification of "the heavens and the earth" with a palace/temple of the divine King (see Kline 2000, 27) is a recurring motif in the biblical text (Is. 66:1; Ps. 11:4; 104). Moreover, the idea of the Tabernacle as a symbol of the universe appears in the postbiblical Jewish literature (Flavius, *Ant.* 3.7.7). Thus, in the Jewish representation of the world, the sanctuary was a microcosmos, a miniature of the created world, in which God resides as King. From this point of view, the creation account can be seen as a liturgical hymn. "A sanctuary is the cosmos in miniature, and the cosmos itself is a sanctuary, depending on which way you look at it." (Averbeck 2003, 817).

Another point of correspondence between creation and the tabernacle is the heptadic structure (six-plus-one) of the creation story in Genesis 1–2:3, which one can find as well, even on the level of linguistic correspondences, in the account about the construction of the tabernacle (Exodus 39–40). The instructions for the construction of the sanctuary include seven divine speeches, and the seventh includes the Sabbath commandment (Ex. 31:12–17). These elements, plus others not mentioned here, are reminiscent of the six-plus-one structure found in the account about the making of the world. As a matter of fact, the activities that the Rabbinical Judaism forbids on Sabbath day were elaborated based on the thirty-nine classes of activities connected with the building of the Tabernacle.

These correspondences connect creation to the sanctuary imagery and bring into focus the sacred character of the whole world. In a general sense, the whole creation is a sacred *space*, which God the Creator made His home.

### *1.2. The meeting and the fellowship stage*

This macrocosmic perspective is reflected in a limited, unique space in creation – the Garden of Eden. The biblical story situates this space in the land of Eden, making explicit that the (hu)man (*'ādām*) was created outside of the garden: "And *YHWH Elohim* planted garden-in-Eden, to the east, and He placed there the man that He had formed" (Gen. 2:8). The biblical text makes obvious that the Garden was distinct from the rest of creation. After the man was "formed" from the dust, the Garden was "planted," and the man was "placed" inside it (Gen. 2:7–8). Even the order of creation inside the Garden does not follow the same progression as in Genesis 1. The Garden seems to be a distinct entity, brought into existence after Adam's creation. The term *gan* means "enclosure," "garden" and denote a clearly defined space.

We notice man's (and woman's?) role within the Garden precincts, which is different from that assigned in Genesis 1. In the Garden, Adam was given the task of serving (*'ābaḏ*) and guarding (*šāmar*), while in the previous story they were told to rule over (*rāḏā*). In the Garden story, God established limits for humans: a certain tree is prohibited from their consumption. Transgressing these limits would bring on death upon them. In this setting, a new relationship is brought into view: that between man and woman. All these elements portray the Garden as a *relational space*: here, the relationships between God and human, and between man and woman are developed. Drawn limits are secondary to the relationship and contingent upon it, and that is because the relationship implies a covenant. Thus, the Garden was a part of creation, assimilated to it, but featured an extra element – *the divine-human relationship*, with all the implications that derive from this.

We cannot list all the correspondences between the Garden and the Jewish sanctuary (e.g., the east-west orientation, a single entrance from the east, the lampstand in form of a tree etc.; for an exhaustive list see Wenham 1986, 19–25). However, it must be said that both spaces share the same function at the core: the dwelling together, the residence of God with the (hu)man (Ex. 25:8). In both spaces, the Presence of God became manifest. The expression *p<sup>e</sup>nē yhw<sup>h</sup>*, “the Face of YHWH,” Gen. 3:8) mentioned for the first time in the Garden story, is equivalent to *lipnē yhw<sup>h</sup>*, “in the Face of YHWH” (Ex. 16:33; Lev. 4:6 etc.) that occurs frequently in relation to the holy-of-holies and the sanctuary (for the identification of “face” with “presence” in the Hebrew Bible see Terrien 1978, 65). As we just mentioned, the name YHWH, that is the Name of the divine Presence, occurs for the first time in the Garden story. The role given to the man is similar in both spaces, the same terms *‘ābaq* and *šāmar* from Gen. 2:15 being used together to depict the ministry of the priests and Levites in the sanctuary (Num. 3:7-8, cf. Num. 1:53). If we add up to these similarities the connection identified in the biblical text between creation and the building of the sanctuary, we come to the same conclusion as Weinfeld, that the two structures are „typologically identical” (Weinfeld 1981, 503). Consequently, the coming of God into the sanctuary was interpreted in Israel, as in other traditions of the ancient Near East, as “rest”, „similar to the rest of God on the seventh day of creation” (Weinfeld 1981, 501 cf. Ps. 132:8.14).

In the light of this identification, we can assimilate the Garden to the holy-of-holies and the tree of life to the ark, where the Presence manifested itself. The fact that man had to consume the fruits of the tree of life to live on, hints to the final stage of the human-God connection, *the fellowship stage*. Thus, the goal of the divine-human meeting by sharing the same space – first the Garden and then the sanctuary – was to fulfill the fellowship of the two beings: God the Creator, the Ruler of the world and the human, the one created in the likeness of God, he (they) being also ruler(s) of the world.

In Lev. 26:11-12, the sanctuary represents not only a physical space, but also an experience identified by the “walking” of YHWH in the middle of Israel, a picture that evokes YHWH Elohim walking in the Garden of Eden (*miḥallēk*, Gen. 3:8). Dwelling with the Presence is conditioned by the observance of the commandment. By means of the Garden, God offers His Presence fully to the humans, giving them the possibility to remain or not in this relationship, the commandment being the prerequisite of remaining in the rest rather than the test for its full realization (cf. Timmer 2009, 81–82).

Barth has seen God’s restrain from work on the seventh day as a way of expressing His freedom (Barth 1961, 215). God works and refrains from working whenever He wants. Likewise, the Garden offers to the human being the freedom to stay in or to go away from the divine Presence. The human obeisance is the key element in this setting. While the creation story represents the structural, basic level of organization in the world’s existence (separation, hierarchization, naming, establishing functions), in the Garden story we are introduced into the relational level of the existence. Creation exists only to be in a relationship with the Creator, through its representative – the human being. When this relationship breaks down, the man and the woman are displaced from the Garden, as a symbol of the relational failure.

After the fall, the access to the tree of life is banned, as an expression of the fact that man cannot live in the divine Presence unless he/she also accepts the conditions of staying in this Presence. In this way, the Garden represents a space of the divine-human meeting, with a stress on the moral aspect of the relationship, which involves direct interaction, personal commitment, responsibilities, and limits. This model was the prototype for later building the sacred spaces. The tabernacle, then the temple, were meant to offer again the possibility of meeting and of fellowship, by restoring the human access to the divine Presence.

However, the Garden was not made explicitly holy, and neither was any other space. The sole mention of the term *qādaš* in Genesis is aimed for the seventh day. This observation is important, as it expresses the priority of time over space.

We can find the most significant connection between the sanctuary and the Garden of Eden in YHWH's utterance regarding the purpose of the sanctuary. Even from its beginning, the fragment that portrays Moses receiving the instructions for the construction contains the *raison d'être* of the edifice: "Let them make a sanctuary (*miqdaš*) to me and I will dwell (*wēšākantî*) amongst them" (Ex. 25:8). Thus, the sanctuary represents a structure in which is reflected YHWH's desire to live with humankind from the very creation in a particular way, in His relationship with the Hebrew people. By extension, one can argue for a correspondence between creation and the exodus, where YHWH is said to have gotten Israel out of chaos (*tōhū*), hovering (*yeraḥēp*) like an eagle over its young and leading them to the Promise Land (Dt. 32:10-11), where he gives them rest (*hēnīah* – Dt. 12:10; 25:19 etc., cf. Ex. 33:14).

We can notice that the verb *šākantî* is an echo of the Garden's cherubim, stationed at its entrance to guard the way to the tree of life (*wayyaškēn*, "cause [them] to dwell"). From the same verb (*šākan*, "to dwell") comes the noun *šēkinā*, which denotes, in the Jewish literature of the later time, God's Presence in the holy-of-holies. A connection is thus made between the two, linking what is carried on in the sanctuary with that moment of expulsion. In a specific way, the access to the Presence of God in the sanctuary was controlled by the priests, as an echo of the celestial guardians (Num. 3:10.38). There were strict rules as to who, when, to where, in what conditions and to what extent could someone get close to the divine Presence. In some cases, the Presence has reacted fiercely when those approaching it ignored the established rules, or if they came with an inappropriate attitude, the result of this misconduct being always death (e.g., Lev. 10:1-7; Num. 16:35 etc.).

The connection between the Name and the Presence in the Torah is established by the fact that the Name "dwells" in the sanctuary (*lāsūm 'et-šēmō šam lešiknō* – "to establish His Name there for His dwelling," Dt. 12:5; *lešakkēn šēmō šam* – "for His Name to dwell there," Dt. 12:11 etc.). It follows that, in the Torah, the Presence of YHWH and the Name YHWH represent one and the same reality. In fact, this identification is apparent from other situations too, as invoking the Name over the people, which means blessing them (*wēšāmū 'et-šēmī 'al-benē yiśrā'ēl wa'anī 'abarākēm*, "and they will put My Name on the people of Israel and I will bless them," Num. 6:27) and the statement that the divine Name brings YHWH close, and also His blessing (*b'kol-hammāqōm 'ašer 'azkîr 'et-šēmī 'ābō' 'elekā ūbēraḳtīkā*, "in all the places where I cause My Name to be remembered I will come to you and I will bless you," Ex. 20:24).

From the same perspective we can understand why it was necessary for the High Priest to carry the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on his garments, *wenāsā' 'ah'arōn 'et-šēmōtam lipnē yhw' 'al-šētē ketēpāyw lezikkārōn* – "and Aaron will carry their names before YHWH on the two shoulders of his for remembrance," Ex. 28:12. In this way, through the Sanctuary, human's presence and God's Presence were in permanent contact. The sanctuary achieved both the coming of the people into the Presence of YHWH, and the coming of YHWH to the people, through the priestly ministry. The sanctuary becomes, in a very real sense, a place of a human-God meeting (*mō'ēd*).

Cassuto highlights the necessity of the people being aware of this Presence of God, living among them:

In order to understand the significance and purpose of the Tabernacle, we must realize that the children of Israel, after they had been privileged to witness the Revelation of God on Mount Sinai, were about to journey from there and thus draw away from the site of the theophany. So long as they were encamped in the place, they were conscious of God's nearness; but once they set out on their journey, it seemed to them as though the link had been broken, unless there were in their midst a tangible symbol of God's presence among them. It was the function of the Tabernacle [literally, 'Dwelling'] to serve as such a symbol (Cassuto 1967, 319).

Given that the sanctuary served as a facilitator for the people's awareness of the divine Presence, as well as a restoring agent for the relationship between the two beings following the

fall, we will now pursue the connection between the seventh day and the divine Presence, and also the role of the Sabbath in restoring the original relationship between God and mankind.

### 1.3. *Creation, sanctuary and Sabbath*

In Genesis 2:1–3, the seventh day hints to the goal of creation, that is the dwelling of God’s Presence into the world. By considering the Garden experience and trying to look at it through the view expressed in Gen. 1:31, we can tell that God’s declaration that “all were exceedingly good” also includes that special connection with the humans, as it is described in Gen. 2:4–3:24 or, as K. Barth said, God refrains from work in the seventh day when “He has found the object of His love” (Barth 1961, 215).

In his study on creation, sanctuary and Sabbath, Timmer reaches the conclusion that what links together these realities is the concept of “rest,” that is a common denominator of them. This rest can be accomplished only within the covenant. As we have seen, the sanctuary represents a space that allows God to dwell amongst the people. The direct links to creation and Sabbath, placed at the key points of the instructions for the building of the tabernacle, and also the correspondences between creation/Garden of Eden and the sanctuary, lead us to consider, along with Timmer, that the “tabernacle and sabbath are conceptually joined [...] as early as the first creation account” (Timmer 2009, 144). He explains this as follows:

God’s unobstructed communion and presence with humanity was the goal of creation, but the entrance of sin meant that this goal could not be achieved apart from the resolution of sin and its consequences. The tabernacle is an intermediate point on the spectrum of God’s presence with humanity, partially because the problem of sin is not fully resolved by the mechanisms of Sinai covenant of which it is a part. Its association with the sabbath accentuates the expectation that God will act eschatologically to resolve his people’s insurmountable lack of full sanctification and bring those whom he forgives and sanctifies into the full enjoyment of his rest (Timmer 2009, 145).

Consequently, while the tabernacle represents a temporary structure, one that recalls Eden, but sets access limits because of the sinful condition of the people, the Sabbath itself recalls the continuance of the residence of the divine Presence in creation, despite of sin, as a perpetual promise that God will not abandon the object of His love even after its disloyalty.

Elaborating on the meaning of the Sabbath as a *sign* of the covenant at Sinai, Timmer observes that, even from the beginning of the Exodus experience and after the crossing of the Red Sea, the biblical text “already hinted that restful life in the land was a goal of the exodus, to which it adds the goal of Yahweh dwelling among his people” (see Ex. 15:17) and that “rest is made the goal of the Sinai covenant in many ways” (Timmer 2009, 56). In Timmer’s view, the reason for which the Sabbath represents the sign of the covenant at Sinai has to do with the goal of the covenant – rest, that involves the divine sovereignty and the Presence of YHWH. It is not difficult to see why the Sabbath, a day of refraining from the creative activity, becomes the key to the covenant of rest. Indeed, for a people just released from the slavery of continual work, “rest” is the most powerful symbol for defining the relationship between God and man. This is the reason why, unlike in Genesis where the verb *šābat* (“to cease”) is linked with the seventh day, in Exodus this ceasing receives content and positive meaning through the verb *nūah* (“to rest”).

This has led the rabbis to infer that God has given the Sabbath to Adam in Eden. In *Bereshit Rabba*, the first Jewish thorough and systematic commentary, as Neusner describes it in the introductory part of his English version (Neusner 1985, ix), finished at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, a connection is made between what was given to man as a task and the rituals to be performed at the temple, and the Sabbath as well. The rabbis interpret the term *wayyanniḥēhū* in Gen. 2:15 (“and He placed him”) as referring to the Sabbath: “‘and he put him’ (Gen. 2:15) means that he gave him the religious duty of observing the Sabbath (נתן לו מצבה שבת)” (Neusner 1985, 175–76). The interpretation is not without fundament, as *wayyanniḥēhū*, coming from the root נ.ו.ח (*n.w.h*), means literally “and He caused him to rest.”

Of course, the wording does not necessarily imply the sabbatical rest, as the phrase could mean here rather “setting him in a place where he could rest,” but the midrash makes a connection with Ex. 20:11, “and He rested in the seventh day,” where it is used the same verb *nūaḥ*. The verbs *ʿābaḏ* and *šāmar* are interpreted in a similar manner, using the method of analogy (*gezērâ šāwâ*), one of the rabbinical rules of interpretation, according to which distinct texts are connected based on common words or phrases. Thus, *ʿābaḏ* is linked with *taʿabōd* in Ex. 20:9, “six days you shall work”, and *šāmar* is linked with *šāmôr* in Dt. 5:12, “keep the Sabbath day to make it holy” (Neusner 1985, 175–76).

## 2. The time of the Presence

Given these three stages of interaction with the Presence, that emerge from the study of the sacred spaces, we will further try to see how the created world interacts with the Presence from the time perspective, seeking to find out how are Presence, meeting and fellowship accomplished in this dimension, and what are the aspects that enable the Sabbath to function as the fundamental environment for the divine-human interaction.

Finally, we will examine this connection established between Sabbath and Presence through the texts that speak of the Presence’s rest – which emerges as the purpose and the final goal of the divine creation. In this way, by restoring the seventh day of creation, the Sabbath becomes the guarantee of this Presence, beyond the Garden’s gates, a time of Presence that ensures that the initial relationship established at the end of creation would continue.

The general stage of the interaction with the Presence in time, as we mentioned earlier, is reached as soon as the creation is completed, and it is hardwired in the created order of six days plus one. That is why this original setting needs to be re-enacted for the next stage to be reached. The episode that witnesses about this is recounted in Exodus 16.

### 2.1. Rhythms of the Presence

The first fragment that refers to the seventh day, after Genesis 2, is Exodus 16.

This text is particularly important for the understanding of the meanings of the Sabbath, being the first fragment that contains the noun *šabbāt*. Here we are recounted an episode from Israel’s journey through the wilderness. Following the people’s dissatisfaction regarding the lack of food, God offers them the manna. In the same instance, God tests (*nāsâ*) the people regarding the Sabbath day (verses 4–5, 28). Moreover, YHWH refers to the Sabbath by *tôrātî* – “My law” and *mišwōtay wʿtôrōtay* – “My commandments and My laws”. What puzzles us in this story is that the Sabbath is referred to as being known by the people even before the giving of the Law on the Mt. Sinai.

There is also a quite strong correspondence between Exodus 16 and Genesis 2:1–3, verse 30 – *wayyišbēʿtū hāʿam bayyôm haššēbīʿî* – being an almost identical rendering of the wording in Gen. 2:2 – *wayyišbōt [ʿlōhîm] bayyôm haššēbīʿî*. Also, the phrase *šabbātôn šabbat-qōdeš layhwh* (verse 23) contains, for the first time in the Hebrew Bible, the nouns *šabbātôn* (“sabbatizing”), and *šabbat* (“ceasing”, “Sabbath”) together in the same place. The mentioning of *qōdeš* in connection with *šabbat* is an allusion to the seventh day of creation, which God sanctified after the six days of activity.

By comparing both texts at the conceptual level, we notice that the divine creative activity in Genesis corresponds to the activities of gathering and preparation of food carried out by the humans, and in both cases the seventh day/Sabbath means ceasing from these activities. God is offering the food daily and people’s only task is to gather and prepare it for eating. On the seventh day, God ceases from His activity and the people also cease from theirs. Although they cease from gathering and processing the resources, people do not lack food on Sabbath because, as an exception, the food gathered on the sixth day is still good to eat on the next day. As Frey observes, both texts in Genesis 1 and Exodus 16 feature the gift of food followed by

the seventh day, as one of the elements that support the interconnection of the two fragments (Frey 2011, 106).

At a deeper level than food, Exodus 16 shows in fact how God educates the people's perception toward the Presence of YHWH. Thus, as a response to the people's complaints that lacked food, first of all the Lord shows His glory in the cloud (verse 10), the glory being associated with other key moments when the Presence of God is manifested in a visible way (the giving of the Law on Sinai, the inauguration of the tabernacle etc.). The cloud, though, has always been there since the crossing of the Red Sea. The text highlights the attention, the turning of face, the focus. It is necessary that the people "turn their face" to the wilderness. This is not by chance, since the wilderness is the source of the people's greatest fears (verse 3, "that you brought us out in this wilderness to cause all this assembly to die by hunger"). But the wilderness is also the place they need to look to in order to see the glory of the Lord, the source of their help and the answer to their needs. This turning of attention to the Lord is the first step in the people's training to perceive the divine Presence that was already in their midst.

The next step is the gathering of the manna that regularly falls every day, satisfying their physical needs. The people perceive daily the Presence of the Lord in the form of food, the answer to their immediate need.

Nevertheless, in the seventh day, the manna does not fall anymore, and the people is let to enjoy food without gathering it. The meaning of the Sabbath here is obvious: it means ceasing from acquiring and preparing food. What needed to be seen as the natural order of things (six days plus one) had to be imposed by command (verses 23–29), because the people did not resonate inside themselves anymore with this order. Regarding verse 29, Frey notices in the text an ironic comment to verse 3, where the people are complaining and lament, saying that they wished to have died in Egypt, where they sat (*yāšab*) by the pots of food, and reproaching Moses and Aaron that they made them get out (*yāšā*) in the wilderness to die. In verse 29, at the end of the command regarding the Sabbath, the people are told to sit (*yāšab*) and not go out (*yāšā*) from their dwellings. "The irony of these two verses shows that it takes a command of YHWH to implement what the people initially wished for, to sit or dwell and eat, and that this desire can be fulfilled only on the Sabbath" (Frey 2011, 103).

We find here the same principle that we found in the creation account in Gen. 1–2:3. God is present beyond activity, resources, or the physical world. By ceasing from their work in the seventh day, the people learn to be aware of God's Presence even when they don't receive food from heaven. This is the first step toward transcending the corporeality and the slavery condition. Thus, for the first time when it appears in the book of the Exodus, the Sabbath is the first clue to the freedom of spirit.

The content of the Sabbath day seen from the perspective of the relationship with the Lord's Presence will be uncovered by means of the shewbread ritual at the sanctuary.

## 2.2. The Presence as fellowship

Another element that connects food and Sabbath is *leḥem happānīm*, "the bread of the Presence" (Ex. 35:13; 1Sam. 21:6 etc.). The ritual is described in Lev. 24:5–9. Every Sabbath, the priests arranged the twelve loaves of bread on the table in the Holy Place. They remained on the table the whole week, till the next Sabbath, when the priests replaced them with new bread and following the replacement they ate the old bread, "in order that the priests who ministered to God should have the privilege of eating from God's table" (Cassuto 1967, 337). At the end of the instructions for the setting of the table on which the bread was to be placed, it is stated: *w<sup>e</sup>nāṭattā 'al-haššulḥan leḥem pānīm l'pānay tāmīd* – "and you shall put on the table bread of the Presence before Me continually" (Ex. 25:30). The most natural meaning of the phrase "bread of the Presence" (lit., "bread of the faces") is, according to Ibn Ezra, that "the breads were called thus as the Tora itself describes G'd as viewing them as constantly in His presence, i.e., enjoying His attention, *lifnei tamīd*" (R. Jacob ben Asher, *Tur HaAroch*, Exodus

25:30). But what is the meaning of placing the bread in the Presence of the Lord? And what signifies its renewal every Sabbath?

In the Talmudic rendering of the ritual, it is stated that the priests entered the place and approached the table, four of them on one side and four of them on the other side, facing each other. Those coming from the North brought the fresh bread and the incense, and those coming from the South ready to take the old bread and the incense: “these withdrew [the old] and these laid down [the new], the handbreadth of one at the side of the handbreadth of the other” (Bab T. *Shabb.* 133b), the action of lifting and replacing being made simultaneously, to fulfill the *tāmīd* commandment. This picture is very suggestive, carrying the meaning of reciprocity and fellowship, an interaction in which both parties received food. Indeed, through this ritual, YHWH sat at the table with the humans. The fact that the bread of the Presence was offered and consumed at the same time on the very Sabbath day is not surprising at all, neither coincidental, but perfectly normal given the meaning of the seventh day as the day of the Presence. And this Presence requiring eating-together, that is a very powerful symbol for the kind of relationship that God desires to have with humans.

By putting the two elements together – the giving of the manna and the shewbread ritual – we realize the full meaning of the Sabbath: on Sabbath, God and human sit at the table, in fellowship with each other. Indeed, to eat together was, in the Near Eastern mentality, the most intimate expression of a relationship between two persons (Pedersen 1926-1940, 305). Both elements of food relate to the Presence in a spatial dimension. Thus, both are placed before the Lord: the bowl of manna was placed in front of the ark, “before YHWH” (*lipnê yhw*), while the bread was placed on the table, “before Me” (*lepānay*). If we consider that the term “Presence” (*pānīm*) is used as a substitute for the Lord Himself (Ex. 33:14; Dt. 4:37), the bread becomes a symbol for the Lord that offers Himself to the people. The bread that remained before the Lord became the bread of Presence, the seventh day being the most suitable timeframe for its consumption.

It is remarkable that both the manna kept in front of the ark and that gathered on the sixth day to be kept for the Sabbath did not alter their quality. There is an explicit connection that the text makes between the seventh day and the ark of YHWH. Both are places of the Presence in the highest degree – one in time and the other in space. Every Sabbath, each person consumed an omer of manna, the other omer being for the Lord, kept through the same miracle of His Presence. Thus, every Sabbath meal was an occasion of fellowship with the divine Presence. In the ritual of the shewbread, the consumption of the bread by the priests represents a more vivid picture of the consummation of this meeting between God and people, on the seventh day, on Sabbath. Because Israel is called “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6), we can say that, through the Levite priests, the whole nation was in fellowship with the Presence of YHWH, partaking of the bread of Presence every Sabbath.

The meaning of fellowship is added to that of ceasing. This idea is highlighted in the remaining of the book of Exodus through the concept of *rest*, which the seventh day relates to. The Decalogue command that establishes the Sabbath as a legal requirement for the people of Israel contains for the first time this aspect of rest in relation to the Sabbath. Thus, “in six days YHWH made the heavens and the sea and all that (is) in them and He rested in the seventh day, that is why YHWH blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Ex. 20:11). The commandment restates all the elements in Genesis 2:2-3, except that it replaces “He ceased” (*wayyīšbōt*) by “He rested” (*wayyānah*). It is not a matter of chance that the verb used to describe man’s placement in the Garden is derived from the root  $\text{נ.ח}$  (*n.w.h*), being a causative of the same verb *nūah* (“to rest”). Based on this common word, as we mentioned earlier, *Bereshit Rabba* makes the connection between Ex. 20:11 and Gen. 2:15 and say the Sabbath was given as early as the Garden of Eden.

The relationship between God and human, which has as its final goal the fellowship of the two beings, takes a definite form in the meanings allotted to the Sabbath by connecting it



with the ceasing from work and with food. The Sabbath recreates the Garden of Eden in the temporal dimension becoming, we could say, a “holy-of-holies” of the days. God is always present with and close by His creation, but on the Sabbath the human being comes even closer to His Presence. By connecting the seventh day/Sabbath with the concepts of *Presence*, *meeting*, *fellowship* and with the alternate concept of *rest* that includes all of the others, the Hebrew Bible creates a model and an interpretative framework of the time, by which the human being can experience the highest level of proximity to the Presence of God.

## Conclusions

By combining the three elements that shape the meaning of the divine rest – the seventh day/Sabbath, the Garden/Sanctuary and the food/bread – we get a full picture of the divine intent regarding creation and the relationship that He desires with the human beings. Moreover, we can observe three stages of this relationship, corresponding to a certain extent to these three elements.

The seventh day creates the general timeframe of interaction between God and creation on the whole and represents the moment in *time* when the reality of the Presence is introduced to the world.

The Garden of Eden creates the specific setting of the divine Presence in relationship with the human – there are dialogue, commandment and obeying, covenant etc. – all these within the limits of a distinct *space*. Here we can also include the later manifestations of the Presence, which has delineated precise spaces that are given the quality of “holiness,” at least as long as they “host” the Presence: the burning bush (Ex. 3), Mount Sinai, the tabernacle, the temple. Among them, the tabernacle recreates in the most specific way the image of the Garden of Eden. The Presence in dialogue with man becomes *meeting*. At the burning bush, the Name of the Presence is revealed as *YHWH* – the same Name that appears for the first time in the Garden story.

The manna and the bread of Presence adds to this the idea of *fellowship*, as an action of the Presence. By overlapping these two instances, there come together the *time* of the Presence, the *space* of the Presence and the *purpose* of the Presence: Sabbath – sanctuary – fellowship.

We can represent the stages of divine-human relationship and the space–time correspondences in the following table:

Table 1. The stages of the divine-human relationship in space and time

<i>Coordinate</i>	<b>Spatial</b>	<b>Temporal</b>	<i>Instance</i>
<i>Stage of relationship</i>			
<b><i>Presence</i></b>	creation	six days	gathering of manna
<b><i>Meeting/Fellowship</i></b>	Garden/tree of life sanctuary/ark	seventh day/ Sabbath	bread of the Presence

We can represent the three stages of proximity to the Presence and the relations between them in the following manner (see next figure):

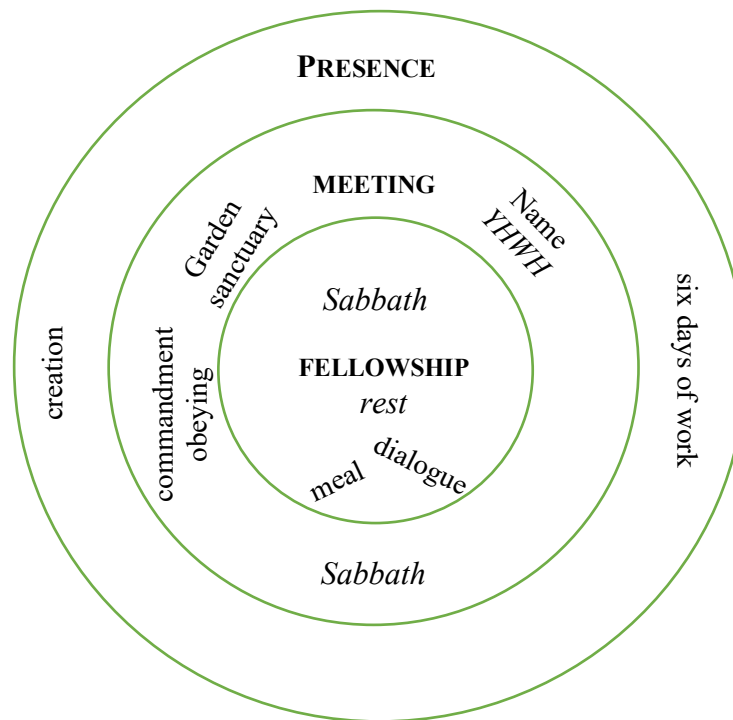


Figure 1. The stages of proximity, their elements, and the relations between them

As we can see from this figure, the seventh day/Sabbath represents the general timeframe in which this interaction between the Presence and the human being takes place. The Sabbath is, by consequence, the prerequisite of the meeting and fellowship stages. It is necessary to cease from “your work” to enter in connection with the Lord.

A reality reveals itself before us, one that was only introduced in Genesis, but unfinished, or better said, uncompleted, because of the break-up that human’s lack of loyalty created. By placing the elements of the Presence in the post-fall history, God fulfills the purpose that He had in view when created the world, continuing with His plan to receive mankind in the fellowship of His Presence.

All the three stages of the relationship between God and creation converge in the priestly ritual of fellowship with the bread of Presence. This took place on the seventh day (the time of the Presence), inside the tabernacle (the space of meeting with the Presence). Thus, the ritual reveals the core of the relationship between God and His creation: the fellowship of the masters – God and human.

While the Presence in space has been limited after the fall, the Presence in time continue to reside after this moment. There is no prohibition in Genesis or in another part of the Bible regarding the seventh day, which is available to anyone. Time is, by its nature, an edifice without restrictions of access – as much as it denies someone the possibility to escape from it. By ceasing from his activity, the man is placed at the entrance into another kind of time, where he/she is awaited, in a constant and continuous way, by the Presence of the Creator. Sabbath is thus the Garden without heavenly guardians to guard its entrance. From this perspective, the seventh day remains the access gate to the divine Presence throughout the entire creation, even without a delimited space of meeting.

Under the circumstances brought out by sin, the Sabbath remains a time of rest, both in its physical dimension and especially in its spiritual aspect. The “work” of Adam inside the Garden has different connotations outside of it, being accompanied by “toil,” “thorns and thistles” and “sweat.” In this context, ceasing from work on the Sabbath has an important role, although not the most important. The ceasing is not the end, but the means that enables humans

to enter in a closer relationship with the Lord. As we could see in Exodus 16, God strives to imprint into the human mind the rhythm of six plus one, bringing back the order of creation into their lives. By orientating themselves to the Lord (“they looked to the wilderness and saw the glory of the Lord”), the need of food leaves the area of chaos and discontent and enters the sphere of trust, of assurance about tomorrow and of dependence on the Lord. The receiving and gathering of the food (*leḥem*) that came from heaven is the modality by which the people experienced daily the glory of the Lord, the visible manifestation of His Presence. By ceasing from any activity on the seventh day, the people had the opportunity to enter the complete rest, where all the needs are already fulfilled and nobody has to work anything, but to be at the table and enjoy the relationship. This “rest” can be experienced even before reaching the Promise Land, since wherever the Presence is, there is rest. For the people of Israel, the Sabbath becomes the sign of the holiness, that comes from this dwelling in the Presence of God. This holiness is not limited to a certain ritual, performed at certain times, but it flows from a perpetual rhythmicity. Once every seven days, Israel entered the Presence of the Lord, to keep themselves into the holiness, that is in the relationship with the Lord. No matter where they were during their existence, once every seven days, in a distinct sense, Israel would rest in the Promise Land, they returned in the Garden of Eden.

No need to say, Israel is just a model for what men can experience in the relationship with the Presence. As long as creation exists, the Sabbath is the God designed way to connect with the transcendent at a deeper level and to experience the Presence of the Creator.

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