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'The Shabbat Effect': A Weekly Reset to Restore the Soul

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The Shabbat Effect by Alan Morinis; Bloomsbury Academic publisher; (c) 2025; 9798881-8078701 192 pages; publication date Nov. 13, 2025; \$30.

By Rabbi Dr. Michael Leo Samuel



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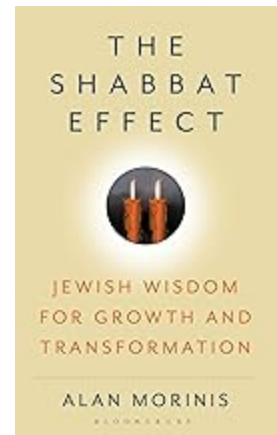
CHULA VISTA, California — Alan Morinis's forthcoming book, *The Shabbat Effect: Jewish Wisdom for Growth and Transformation* reimagines the ancient Jewish practice of Shabbat as a transformative tool for personal and spiritual development, rooted in the 1,100-year-old Mussar tradition of ethical character refinement.

As a Rhodes Scholar, anthropologist, filmmaker, and founder of The Mussar Institute—author of acclaimed works like *Everyday Holiness* and *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*—Morinis presents Shabbat not as a burdensome ritual but as a vital, rejuvenating

pause amid modern life's chaos. Invoking the Hebrew *nifash* from Exodus 31:17, which links "rest" to "breath" and "soul" (*nefesh*), he describes it as a "soulful breath": a sacred imitation of God's post-creation repose—not from fatigue, but as a divine blueprint for humanity to favor inner renewal over ceaseless striving.

Morinis' perspective echoes psychologist Erich Fromm's insights in *To Have or to Be?* (1976), where he contrasts two existential modes: the "having" mode—prevalent in capitalist society, marked by possessive greed, alienation, and exploitation of self, others, and nature for illusory security ("I am what I have")—with the "being" mode, which nurtures aliveness, sharing, creativity, and fulfillment through relational engagement ("I am through loving and contributing").

Fromm casts Shabbat, Judaism's core commandment (the Ten Commandments' sole purely religious one), as the epitome of being: a weekly "truce" halting creation, destruction, acquisition, and even minor acts like tearing grass or transferring property, freeing one to live "as if one has nothing."



This idea resonates deeply in a world saturated with constant connectivity and output-driven demands. A personal anecdote illustrates this: while traveling in Africa (many years ago!), I observed local carriers pause after a day of rapid progress, refusing to move until their souls could “catch up” with their bodies. This story echoes Morinis’s vision of Shabbat as a weekly reset, allowing the soul to realign with the body’s pace. He argues that this cessation from creative labor—rooted in the commandment to abstain from work—creates space for reflection, fostering balance, gratitude, and presence. Through Mussar’s lens, Morinis connects this practice to cultivating eight core character traits, such as patience, humility, trust, equanimity, and loving-kindness, which ripple beyond the seventh day into daily life.

The book’s structure is approachable, blending ancient Jewish sources like Talmudic tales and teachings from Mussar masters, such as Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, with modern psychology and relatable stories from contemporary practitioners. For example, Morinis might describe someone finding peace by unplugging from digital devices, showing how Shabbat’s rest mirrors divine intentionality to sanctify creation. Each chapter likely explores one of the eight traits, offering insights from texts, reflections on their relevance, and practical exercises—journaling prompts, guided meditations, or behavioral challenges—to embody virtues, much like the daily practices in *Every Day, Holy Day*. This hands-on approach aligns with Morinis’s belief that “you don’t study Mussar; you do Mussar,” emphasizing lived transformation over intellectual study.

The *Shabbat Effect* shines in its accessibility, with Morinis’s warm, jargon-free style making complex spiritual ideas relatable to Jews and non-Jews alike. His storytelling, informed by his filmmaking background, balances scholarly rigor with engaging narratives, broadening the book’s appeal to those seeking mindfulness, comparable to Stoicism or Buddhist meditation. He addresses secular skepticism, such as time constraints or perceived inconvenience, by encouraging readers to adapt Shabbat’s principles—rest, reflection, community—to their lives. Practical tools, like pausing work to cultivate patience or joining communal prayer to foster connection, empower readers to experience Shabbat’s benefits firsthand, making it a sanctuary from digital distractions and a path to deeper relationships with self and others.

Ultimately, *The Shabbat Effect* is a compelling, practical guide to harnessing Shabbat’s sacred rhythm for profound transformation. By offering a structured yet flexible approach to rest and character growth, it invites readers to reclaim time, nurture relationships, and rediscover meaning in a distracted world. My African carriers’ story underscores this wisdom: just as they paused for their souls, Morinis shows how Shabbat empowers us to do the same.

Available for pre-order discount, this \$30 book is a valuable investment for anyone seeking spirituality, self-improvement, or a mindful pause in modern life’s relentless pace.

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