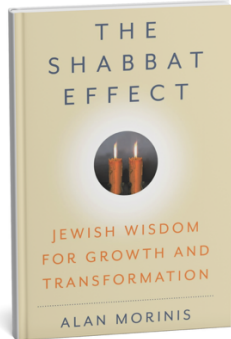


READING GROUP GUIDE

The Shabbat Effect: Jewish Wisdom for Growth and Transformation

by Alan Morinis



About the Book:

“Alan Morinis vividly pulls the reader into the unique spiritual gifts of the great paradox that is the Jewish halachic Sabbath: the radical expansion of spirituality, achieved by doing nothing evident.”

Rabbi Hillel Goldberg

With his bestselling spiritual guidebook, *EVERYDAY HOLINESS*, Alan Morinis inspired thousands of readers to discover the wisdom and practical impact of the Jewish spiritual tradition of Mussar. Now, in *THE SHABBAT EFFECT*, Morinis illuminates how carving out a weekly day set aside for rest can bring about a deep, lasting, and pervasive transformation of character, not just on that seventh day but every day. Drawing on venerable Jewish sources as well as the experiences of contemporary practitioners, this user-friendly and accessible guide explores eight essential traits that can flourish in your life through embracing the practice of Shabbat.

Illuminating, enlightening and uplifting, *THE SHABBAT EFFECT* is a lucid guide to reinvigorating an ancient religious practice – right at the heart of your life.

This Discussion Guide

This guide provides questions to help you probe, understand and draw benefit from every chapter of the book. It is not necessary that you deal with every question. Nor should you feel limited by the questions provided here: if something else in your reading caught your attention, confused you, or provided an insight, feel free to bring that out for discussion as well.



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INTRODUCTION

1. Morinis begins the Introduction to the book with the statement, “The drive to improve is deeply seated in the human soul, and every human being feels it. We intuit that we have the potential to be so much more than we are today.” Do you agree? How do you experience this drive? What goal do you think it serves?

2. Discuss the following quote from Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein: “A person’s primary mission in this world is to purify and elevate the soul” (p.1). Do you agree with this statement?

What follows in the book is a description of the pathway people can follow in pursuit of this goal. Can you articulate that pathway in your own words? Do you agree that character is as important as the book portrays?

3. Still in the Introduction, the book introduces the subject of Shabbat with the biblical verses that establish this seventh day of rest. What does Shabbat mean to you? How do you practice it?

Try This: The book advocates for keeping a journal and a good place to start will be to write out how you answered the last two questions:

- What does Shabbat mean to you?
- How do you practice it?

This will create a baseline against which to measure whether your understandings or practice change as you read the book.

4. Discuss the statement that “A Shabbat without a governing framework is no better than nodding off in front of the television for the sake of rest, while a Shabbat without spirit misses the point entirely” (p.7). Do you agree?

5. What do you think of the idea of shutting off devices for one day a week? Is this something you already do? If not, what do you feel about that practice?

Try This: If you do not already do so, try shutting off your phone this Shabbat.

CHAPTER 1



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6. Are you aware that sometimes your mind is dull? (p.18) What factors do you think contribute to that condition?
7. The discussion on p. 23 concerns the precise times that bracket Shabbat. Do you light Shabbat candles? If so, what markers do you use to determine when to light the candles? Do you see precision in time as a good thing or perhaps unnecessarily rigid? Discuss.
8. What do you think of the proposition (p.29) that Shabbat observance is an effective aid to developing a brightly alert mind?
9. Did you try doing the practice to cultivate *zehirut* that is suggested at the end of the chapter? If you did, what was your experience with it?

CHAPTER 2

10. Chapter 2 focuses on rest. How rested do you feel on a daily basis? In what ways do you currently “rest and recharge”? Are those means sufficient to do the job for you?
11. This chapter discusses equanimity, an inner condition of being emotionally balanced. How strong is your trait of equanimity? Do you feel this is something that can be cultivated and developed, or are our emotions just too strong to harness?
12. Did you follow the suggestion to create a *kabbala* that whatever happens to you and around you on Shabbat, you will ride the experience as if you were a boat rising and falling on the waves but remaining upright and unperturbed? How did that experience go for you?
13. When you read the story about author Herman Wouk’s experience of abandoning his plays in order to observe Shabbat, do you think he was being wise or irresponsible or something else?

CHAPTER 3

14. The concept of “enoughness” explored in this chapter is of great relevance to our consumer society. How does consumption (which includes shopping, and earning money to shop, prioritizing acquisitions, storing and maintaining and disposing of stuff, etc.) figure into your life? What effect do you see consumption having on your life? What benefit do you think would come to you if you made a practice of interrupting your current consumer habits?



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15. If the idea of limiting consumption appeals to you, what inner obstacles do you see to making the choice to restrict your acquisition and consumption?

16. As a thought experiment, imagine that everything you have right now is absolutely sufficient and all your needs are satisfied. How does that feel? Is it a fantasy or an attainable reality for you?

Try This: If you do not already do this, commit to not purchasing or otherwise acquiring anything on the next Shabbat. Discuss your experience in your next reading group meeting.

CHAPTER 4

17. The chapter opens by making a distinction between happiness and joy. How do you understand the difference that the book explains? Is this distinction meaningful for you?

18. Can you share one experience that has brought you happiness and another than has brought you joy?

19. Discuss the idea that Shabbat could be a gateway to joy by offering an opportunity to “break free of the relentless cycles of desire, work, and accumulation that dominate our lives and deplete our souls.”

20. Do you agree that physical pleasure can be raised up to be spiritual? How could you do this in your own life? Is there any physical pleasure you enjoy on Shabbat that you could lift up to be spiritual? How would you do that?

21. Did you try the practice of identifying something you enjoy that you engaged in on Shabbat with the recognition that you sought not just sensory gratification but an encounter with the holy? What was your experience of trying to “lift up” your pleasant experience into the realm of the spiritual so that the pleasure served as a doorway to a higher realm?

CHAPTER 5

22. The chapter begins by pointing out that the Hebrew word for peace (“*shalom*”) comes from the same linguistic root as the word for whole or complete (“*shalem*”). What does that teach you about peace? Where in your world do you see that this lesson is relevant?

23. Which do you think captures more of the essence of the word *shalom*: “peace” or “harmony”? Why?



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24. What conditions do you see as needing to be fulfilled if the seventh day is to be a taste of a world in which wholeness and harmony prevail?

25. What are the main factors that will give rise to *shalom bayit* – peace in the home?

26. **Try This:** The chapter ends with the suggestion of a practice: refraining from arguing or harsh words for a specified period of time on Shabbat. Did you try that practice? How long did you set as your practice period? What did you experience? What did you learn?

CHAPTER 6

27. How do you understand what Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel meant when he said, “All my days I have grown up among the wise, and I have found nothing better for the body than silence”? Why “the body”?

28. In examples can you give to support the statement: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue”?

29. Do you think that the biggest contemporary issue around speech is truth, or causing harm with words, or something else?

30. Do you see the value in pausing before speaking? What do you think would make a practice like that difficult for you? What would you have to do to implement it?

31. Discuss the part of Psalm 19 quoted in this chapter:

The heavens declare the glory of God
The skies proclaim the work of His hands.
Day to day they pour forth speech,
Night to night they communicate knowledge.
There is no speech, there are no words,
Their voice is not heard.
Yet their music carries throughout the earth.

32. What benefits might you see coming from practicing contemplative silence? Do you have any experience with that? How could you make silence part of your Shabbat practice?

CHAPTER 7



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- 33.** Discuss the four refractions on trust mentioned in the chapter, and argue for the one that seems closest to your own sense of the term.
- 34.** The manna that fed the people in the desert is often cited as a great lesson in trust. In what ways might that archetype play out in your own life?
- 35.** What connection is there between practicing the trait of trust and observing Shabbat?
- 36.** Morinis writes: “The key element in trust is the recognition that what is happening is not all about me.” Why do you think that is the case?
- 37. Try This:** The chapter proposes reciting the phrase “*Evtach v’lo efchad*”—“I will trust and will not fear”? Have you tried out that practice? If you did, what was your experience? If not, why not? Why do you think the Mussar masters of the past made recitations like this part of traditional Mussar practice?

CHAPTER 8

- 38.** Given that holiness is acknowledged to be impossible to define, after reading the chapter, how do you understand that term?
- 39.** What is the source of the holiness of Shabbat? What significance does that hold for you?
- 40.** Do you agree that “human beings have a crucial role in the process of sanctification”? What role do people in that process? What about you?
- 41.** What do you think of the analogy the text draws between the process of creating wine and our own spiritual growth?
- 42.** “In our observance of Shabbat, the focus should be on the spiritual, but we need to acknowledge and accept the crucial role played by the ‘cup’ of structure because, without a cup, the wine dribbles away.” Discuss.
- 43.** Morinis wonders about: “What efforts we can make regarding Shabbat that will open the way to receiving the gift of holiness?” What is your answer to his question?
- 44.** Discuss the role of boundaries in creating holiness.

CONCLUSION



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45. Does the statement “Any effort to grow spiritually tends to trigger inner challenges that need to be worked through for that growth to take place” correspond to experiences you have had? For example?

46. The traditional Jewish understanding is that the inner obstacle to spiritual growth is what is called the *yetzer ha’ra*. Can you relate that concept to your own inner experience when you have tried to make change for the better in your life?

47. In what way would you expect to learn lessons about yourself through engaging more deeply with spiritual side of Shabbat practice? In regard to which practices or *middot* would you expect your *yetzer ha’ra* to be most active?

48. Is flourishing like the palm-tree and growing like a cedar in Lebanon a reward you find it meaningful to pursue?

Author Bio

Alan Morinis received his doctorate from Oxford University which he attended on a Rhodes Scholarship. He is one the leading lights in the revival of the Jewish spiritual tradition of Mussar and is the author of *Climbing Jacob’s Ladder* (2002), *Everyday Holiness* (2007), *With Heart in Mind* (2014) and now *The Shabbat Effect* (2026).

He is a student of Rabbi Yechiel Yitzchok Perr, and in 2004 founded The Mussar Institute which has grown to become the world’s leading provider of contemporary Mussar resources and instruction, offering courses, facilitator training, curricula for congregations and organizations, special events, speakers, and retreats.

Alan is a sought-after speaker and spiritual teacher who will be on tour with *The Shabbat Effect* in early 2026.

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