

## »Der Sabbat« as a Point of Reference for Evaluating Erich Fromm's Approach to Jewish Law: A Prelude to Fromm's Contribution to Modern Jewish Thought

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*Der Sabbat* (Fromm 1927a) is Erich Fromm's first publication in a scientific journal, published in 1927 in Freud's *Imago*, and his first reference to religion from a psychoanalytic perspective.<sup>1</sup> *Der Sabbat* is undoubtedly an extraordinary paper in Fromm's thought. First, because Fromm later moved away from the conservative Freudian psychoanalytic method, and the pure oedipal approach he presents to religion and Judaism does not reflect his later thought. Second, the way in which the Sabbath is presented in this essay differs from the way it was presented earlier in his 1922 doctoral dissertation *The Jewish Law* (Fromm 1989b) and his later writings (*The Forgotten Language* (1951a), *You shall be as Gods* (1966a), and *To Have or to Be* (1976a)). However, his early article reflects his interdisciplinary approach and unique creativity that will characterize his future works. The Sabbath is, therefore, an interesting point of departure to examine the development of Fromm's thought concerning Judaism and law in religion.

This paper presents a conceptual comparison between Fromm's early and late writings about the Sabbath. First, I will briefly note that the biographical value of *Der Sabbat* is undoubtedly central. According to Frieda Fromm-Reichmann (1889–1957), Erich's first wife, the article's publication marks the end of four years' activity of the »Torah-peutikum« (1923–1927; cf. Scholem 1980, p. 56), the psychoanalytic institute which she established with Erich, an institute that combined psychoanalytic therapy with Jewish tradition. Frieda published in the same issue of *Imago* an article on Jewish food rituals (Fromm-Reichmann 1995). She says that the publication of the two articles was a general statement

1 An English translation of Fromm's article *Der Sabbat* is published for the first time in this volume. Page numbers refer to this translation.

by the two of replacing the Jewish conservative religious way of life with an intellectual-scientific approach.<sup>2</sup> *Der Sabbat* represents a change in Fromm's lifestyle and thought. In my opinion, this change is not necessarily expressed in the conclusions of his study but is reflected methodically in Fromm's wording of his research question: What is the origin and meaning of the Sabbath, and more specifically how can we understand the inconvenient prohibitions of work in light of the Sabbath rest?

In 1963, in the introduction to the English edition of *The Dogma of Christ* (1930a), thirty-three years after the book appeared in German, Fromm (1963a, pp. vii-viii) writes:

»First of all, it was written in a period when I was a strict Freudian. In the meantime, my psychoanalytic views have undergone enough of a change so that many formulations in this essay would be different if I wrote them today.«

This statement could be appropriate for *Der Sabbat* as well. However, unlike *The Dogma of Christ*, *Der Sabbat* was not translated or published in English, so there was no need to explain problems or weaknesses in it. In addition, his references to the Sabbath in his later writings »modify« the way *Der Sabbat* was presented in a 1927, though this is not explicitly stated. That is to say, although Fromm returns to this topic, he does not mention his first publication on the subject in his later writings. Even though there are some references in the research literature to how Fromm presents the Sabbath in his later writings, there is very little reference to his early article.

In 1927, Fromm was already in the midst of his studies of psychoanalysis and offered an analysis based on the oedipal complex, concluding that »the Sabbath was originally intended to commemorate the killing of the father and the conquest of the mother« (Fromm 1927a, p. 17).

From a Jewish perspective, it may not be difficult to find reasons why his daring article did not resonate in research dealing with psychoanalytic interpre-

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2 Fromm-Reichmann 1954: »I published a paper about the analysis of the Jewish food rituals and Erich, an analysis of the Sabbath or Yom Kippur, or both. And that's how we announced we were through. If you don't think that's in big style!« – See also Friedman 2014, p. 24, and Fromm's letter to Ernest Simon of 7.1.1977: »If you say I have turned away from the Jewish tradition, this is true and not true, depending what is meant by the sentence. If you say I have turned away from the life of a practicing Jew which I led until the end of my twenties, you are of course right, but my interest in and love for the Jewish tradition has never died and nobody can talk to me for any length of time who will not hear a Talmudic or Hasidic story.«

tations of Judaism. When Freud published his *Moses and Monotheism* in 1939, applying the narrative of the oedipal relationships between Moses and the Israelites, his book drew severe criticism and even rage.<sup>3</sup> There is no basis for comparing the acceptance and echoes evoked by the father of psychoanalysis and the short article by the young Fromm. However, Fromm is considered to be among the first psychoanalysts who sought to understand Judaism in terms of psychoanalysis. Carl Clemen (1930), the theologian and historian of religion, argued that Fromm's *Der Sabbat*, similar to other early psychoanalytic articles (Theodor Reik's essays on »The Shofar« and »Kol Nidre«, Karl Abraham essay on »The day of Atonement«, as well as Frieda Fromm-Reichmann on »Jewish Food Rituals«), expresses a blind belief in Freudian theory and a biased attempt to subordinate its concepts to other fields. Clemen argues that there is no evidence in the Bible that supports Fromm's ideas. In his essays on the psychoanalytic study of Judaism, Abraham Cronbach (1931) mentions Fromm's *Der Sabbat* in various contexts. Alan Dundes (2002, p. 91) claims that Fromm's attempt to analyze the Sabbath psychoanalytically, despite its primacy, is not even mentioned in a contemporary survey of psychoanalytic interpretations of Judaism [in English].<sup>4</sup> Jürgen Hardeck (1992, p. 133) mentions that a critic of psychoanalysis has called the theory expressed in *Der Sabbat* »sheer nonsense« (*baren Unsinn*). Lundgren (1998, p. 146) writes in his comprehensive book on Fromm's attitude to religion that *Der Sabbat* is not representative of Fromm's thought and: »We will therefore not analyze this essay in detail.«

Indeed, unlike his earlier article, the way in which Fromm describes the Sabbath in his later works was addressed in Jewish thought. Elliot Gretel (1999, p. 431) writes:

»There is not a knowledgeable Jewish preacher who at one time or another has not cited Fromm's brilliant defense of the Sabbath in *The Forgotten Language*. [...] Fromm's concept of the Sabbath comes remarkably close to that of Abraham Heschel, who was writing at around the same time.«

*The Sabbath* by Rabbi Abraham Heschel (1907–1972) was published, similar

3 See Buber 1958, p. 7 fn; Kaufmann (1956, p. 4, 42 [Hebrew]) rejects the historical value of Freud's *Moses* and presents it as »nonsense« and »vanity«. See also Strauss 1997.

4 Dundes (2002) refers to the works of Benjamin Beit-Hallahemi (1994 and 1996). Indeed, Beit-Hallahemi does not refer to Fromm's »Der Sabbat«, however, it should be noted that Beit-Hallahemi refers only to psychoanalytic works that have appeared in English.

to Fromm's *The Forgotten Language*, in New York in 1951. Heschel and Fromm do not mention each other in these works, issued by different publishers, even though they probably have met earlier in the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt.<sup>5</sup> Heschel's book is broad and written from the point of view of a philosopher and an observant Jew, while Fromm, in *The Forgotten Language*, devotes a short chapter written from the perspective of a psychologist and cultural researcher. Nevertheless, there are some similarities between the essays. Heschel (1994, p. 8) presents Judaism as a »religion of time« whose purpose is the sanctification of time.<sup>6</sup> The Sabbath is a »palace in time«, that is dedicated to the liberation of man from unconditional submission to space and the renewal of spiritual life by the sense of eternity in time. (See *ibid.*, p. 6.) The Sabbath is »a profound conscious harmony of man and the world, a sympathy for all things and a participation in the spirit that unites what is below and what is above.« (*Ibid.*, pp. 31 f.) Comparable words can be found in Fromm's *The Forgotten Language* (1951a, p. 245):

»The Sabbath symbolizes a state of complete harmony between man and nature and between man and man. By not working – that is to say, by not participating in the process of natural and social change – man is free from the chains of nature and from the chains of time, although only for one day a week.»

The biblical Sabbath symbolizes »man's victory over time«. (*Ibid.*, p. 249; cf. Fromm 1961b, p. 40.)

For both of them, the Sabbath is meaningful to the modern man as it addresses the challenges of the technological and alienated world. Both emphasize the democratic aspects of the Sabbath and present it as relevant to

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5 Fromm was among the founders of the »Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus« in Frankfurt. In 1923–1924 he lectured there. From 1933, Martin Buber was the director of the Lehrhaus. In 1936 Buber invited Heschel to replace him, probably based on Heschel's visits to the institute earlier. Heschel came to Frankfurt and was the director of the institute until it was closed in 1938. Prof. Daniel Breslauer (1975) devoted a comparative study to Heschel and Fromm on the Sabbath. Unfortunately, his research was never published and a copy of the lecture delivered in 1975 is not available. Breslauer told me that he believes that Fromm and Heschel met in the Lehrhaus in Frankfurt.

6 According to Heschel, the beliefs and customs of Judaism teaches the Jew to connect sacredness to time. The Jewish calendar, times of prayer, the memory of the Exodus, Mount Sinai event, the Messianic hope for the future to come, are all matters that link faith to time, not to space.

humanity, not only to Jews.<sup>7</sup> Both criticizes the mechanical, »behavioristic« and authoritarian fulfilment of religious laws.

However, there is a methodological difference. Heschel's initial point is philosophical-religious; he opens his book with a polemic tone, criticizing modern and pantheistic conceptions that sanctify space and objects in space, subordinating time to space, and thus lacking a proper understanding of holiness. Heschel (1994) writes:

»Technical civilization is man's conquest of space. It is a triumph frequently achieved by sacrificing an essential ingredient of existence, namely, time. In technical civilization, we expend time to gain space. [...] What we plead against is man's unconditional surrender to space, his enslavement to things. We must not forget that it is not a thing that lends significance to a moment; it is the moment that lends significance to things.«

Fromm's point of departure in *The Forgotten Language* (1951a, pp. 243 f.) is modern thinking itself and is based on the attempt to find a satisfactory solution to the question: *If the Sabbath is a day of rest, how should we understand the inconvenience and discomfort of the Sabbath rituals?* Heschel presents the eternal value of the Sabbath through discussion of the philosophy of time. His emphasis is on the person's well-being, his peace and his attitude to the world in light of the possibility of a connection with God. Fromm, however, addresses the inconvenient elements of Sabbath that »disturb« the rest. Fromm clarifies their meaning within the Torah and Halakhic context and their value for human freedom. Heschel defends the philosophical idea of Sabbath, while Fromm defends the rabbinic observance of it (see Gertel 1999, p. 431, and cf. Kimelman (2007, pp. 187–190), who thinks that Fromm's Sabbath in *The Forgotten Language* is based on the German essay from 1927).

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7 »I do believe that the principle of the Sabbath rest might be adopted by a much larger number of people – Christians, Jews, and people outside of any religion. The Sabbath day, for them, would be a day of contemplation, reading, meaningful conversation, a day of rest and joy, completely free from all practical and mundane concerns.« (Fromm 1966a, p. 157 fn.) or (Fromm 1976a, p. 42): »One might ask if it is not time to re-establish the Sabbath as a universal day of harmony and peace, as the human day that anticipates the human future«. See also Fromm 1989b, pp. 134–136, and Lundgren 1998, pp. 147 f. In addition see Nobel 2007 and Cohen 1995, pp. 155 f., 359: The Sabbath is »the great law, which became the basic social law of the European people. [...] the law of Sabbath, which has to be recognized as the quintessence of the monotheistic moral teaching«.

In the sixties Fromm responded to Rabbi Morris Adler's<sup>8</sup> request, sending him the article »Meaning of the Sabbath« (Fromm 1965z04). The wording of this article is almost identical to *The Forgotten Language* version.<sup>9</sup> A year later, in *You Shall Be as Gods*, Fromm presents a similar version of the text that emphasizes slightly the Sabbath's connection to the messianic idea.<sup>10</sup> There, Fromm refers to Heschel's *The Sabbath*, which he says »contains a beautiful and profound analysis of the Sabbath« (Fromm 1966a, p. 153). In *To Have Or to Be?*, written at the age of 76, Fromm deals again with the subject of Sabbath; there he writes that the Sabbath is »one of the great innovations in human evolution« (Fromm 1976a, pp. 41–43, 96.).

Reuven Bulka (1973, pp. 129, 135 fn. 24) notes that Fromm develops an understanding of Sabbath »in many ways superior to some Jewish apologetics«. Beatrice Bruteau's *The Great Sabbath* (1990) is largely based on the Sabbath according to Fromm. Alongside these articles, there are various internet web-pages that mention Fromm's remarks about the sabbath.<sup>11</sup>

In my opinion, Fromm's later writings on the Sabbath have earned him, in the German and English-speaking world, the status of an intellectual representative of the Sabbath in modern Jewish thought alongside Heschel. Common to articles that refer to Fromm's Sabbath is that they completely neglect his *Der Sabbat* from 1927.

8 Rabbi Morris Adler (1906–1996), born in Russia, was a leader of a conservative community in the Detroit area, and author of *The World of the Talmud* [1959]. It is interesting that Adler asked Fromm (rather than Heschel) for an article for a book he was editing. Maybe Adler saw Fromm's article as less philosophical and directly confronted with understanding the Sabbath in light of the challenges of modernity.

9 In *The Forgotten Language* (1951a) a complete biblical source appears (Isaiah 2: 1–4) as well as a final sentence that emphasizes the Messianic idea of the Sabbath. The final paragraph in *The Forgotten Language* refers to the Babylonian Sabattu.

10 The Sabbath description in both essays is almost identical. Fromm used the text from *The Forgotten Language* (1951a). In *You Shall be as Gods* (1966a) he adds an introductory paragraph, a footnote at the end, and erases a discussion on paradise. Changing the order of presentation, in my opinion, emphasizes the socio-moral significance of the Sabbath rest and the connection to messianism. The description of paradise in *The Forgotten Language* shows the harmony that has been violated with man's freedom – and there he refers to *Escape from Freedom* (1941a). In *You Shall Be as Gods*, the Sabbath connection to Messianism is emphasized in the introductory paragraph and with a reference to a halakhic source (*Sabbath* 118a; *Beitzah* 16a). Also, at the end of the discussion, he adds a footnote about the universal value of the Sabbath – which also can apply to non-Jews.

11 E.g. <https://judaism.stackexchange.com/questions/86963/how-accurate-is-erich-fromms-interpretation-of-the-shabbat/86964>«86964. This web-site asks (November 2017) whether Fromm's Sabbath in *To Have or to Be?* is commonly shared by believers and experts in Jewish law and tradition.

In the early seventies, Don Hausdorff mentioned that Fromm's *Der Sabbat* 1927 sought to bring together theories drawn from his highly diversified education, and it demonstrated the forthrightness and bold synthesis of methods that would stamp all his future work. (Hausdorff (1972, pp. 18–20; cf. Akrap 2011, pp. 144 ff.) Joan Braune writes that *Der Sabbat* is »a bit reductionist« and despite »some weaknesses«, this article is important for the development of Fromm's thought, because it is his first attempt to apply psychoanalytic theory to a concrete sociological phenomenon (Braune 2014, p. 16). Furthermore, she claims that it was Fromm's first published text dealing with messianism, although it lacked the complexity of his later work on the topic. Braune concludes that Fromm's works *Der Sabbat* (1927a) and *The Jewish Law* (1989b) demonstrate that he *brought* his socialist radicalism to the social research Institute (the Frankfurt School).

### **The Sabbath in Fromm's *Das Jüdische Gesetz (The Jewish Law)***

In 1922, Fromm received a doctorate title for a dissertation named *The Jewish Law: A Contribution to the Sociology of Jewish Diaspora* (Fromm 1989b). Fromm presents a socio-historical analysis to examine the relation of Halakhic law, and how the law preserves social cohesion and the continuity of historical Judaism. He argues that Diaspora Jewry maintained social cohesion from the exile after the destruction of the Second Temple to the 19<sup>th</sup> century even though it was not based on state, territorial sovereignty, shared secular language, or an opportunity to build a place of worship, and despite the influence of different and foreign cultures. Social cohesion was maintained because of its relation to the law: mainly circumcision, Sabbath and the dietary laws.

His understanding of the Sabbath in his dissertation is with accordance with his orthodox Jewish education that he received at home and with the influence of Rabbi Nehemiah Nobel (1871–1922). Fromm attended Nobel's student circle during the years 1916–1922. Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, Rabbi Baruch Rabinkow and other Jewish thinkers that he met at Nobel's students circle and at the *Freie Jüdisches Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt (see Funk 2000, p. 25). Fromm grew up in a religious house. They held a Sabbath at home on Friday evenings, sang Sabbath hymns and stayed at home during the Sabbath. Fromm's approach to the Jewish way of life was orthodox, but his social connections (with Nehemiah Nobel, Georg Salzberger and others) indicate that he did not have a fanatic religious attitude.

In his dissertation, Fromm (1989b, pp. 34 f.) stresses the social, moral and religious-spiritual value of religious laws. Following Cohen, Fromm sees mes-

sianism as the way that monotheistic ethics bring itself to realization. The messianic idea is the metaphysical dimension of the law that creates a correlation between the religious idea and the social reality. Messianism, as formulated in the vision of the prophets, establishes a socio-ethical task, expressed in the law (see also Fromm 1975d). He recognizes an essential connection between the Sabbath and the messianic idea. He writes:

»The law is intended to change the [human] environment and not directly the human being. This is most clearly seen in the *Sabbath law*. The law seeks to change the environment in order to give humans a chance to change themselves.«<sup>12</sup>

The connection between Sabbath and messianism appears in all his later writings on this topic, as well as in *Der Sabbat* though in a different form.

In *Das Jüdische Gesetz* (ibid., p. 36), Sabbath is presented as the most central law in Judaism (alongside circumcision), and it appears as a starting point in several discussions that examine the acceptance of the law among three Jewish communities in the diaspora: Karaite Judaism, Reform Judaism and Hasidism.

According to Fromm, the Karaites and Reform Judaism changed the status and binding validity of Halakhic law, including the Sabbath, due to socio-economic circumstances (cf. ibid., p. 182). The Karaite sect is an early historical example of a community that changed its attitude towards the Halakhic law and the results of this change led to its separation from rabbinic Judaism (ibid., pp. 83–96). His criticism of the Reform movement in Judaism is explicit and severe.

In Reform Judaism, the status of Halakhic law has declined because it has been an obstacle for the entry and integration of Jews into the General-Christian society and their capitalist economy. The changes for which the reformers were striving, i.e., shifting the day of rest to Sunday, changing the dietary laws and reducing the prayers, express, according to Fromm, »the triumph of capitalism over the spirit of Judaism« (ibid., p. 131, 189). In contrast to the Karaites and the Reform movement, Fromm argues that Hasidism (which developed in Russia and Poland in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries) is the historical expression of authentic Judaism in the Diaspora. Hasidism responded to social and economic changes in creative ways without compromising the status of the Halakha (ibid., p. 186).

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12 Fromm 1989b, p. 32 (my emphasis). The term »Umwelt« (environment, world), in Alfred Weber's sociology, refers to the human-environment (cf. Cohen 1995, pp. 158 f.).

Fromm's criticism of the reform is explicitly following Nobel's approach. Nobel's ideas, as they appear in his Sabbath sermons and especially in the *Richtlinien* (The Guidelines<sup>13</sup>) are widely reviewed in Fromm's dissertation (ibid., p. 120, 130). Following Nobel, Fromm argues that the Reform struggle against the Halakha is a struggle against the heart of authentic Judaism and poses a risk to Judaism itself (ibid., p. 189; cf. Cohen 1995, pp. 155 f.). Nobel did not accept the Liberal-reform's assertion that the Jewish law should be understood in light of historical processes and be adapted to scientific findings and time necessities.

The attitude to the Sabbath law is at the heart of the controversy. In the *Richtlinien*, the Reform rabbis agree that there are Sabbath aspects that can be ignored. In fact, only what promotes moral activity and community-festivity should be maintained (see Ellenson 1998, p. 14). Nobel's criticism of the *Richtlinien* is harsh (see Nobel 2007). His arguments, embroidered as a learned and poetic rabbinic sermon, are presented conceptually and historically in Fromm's academic analysis. For example, the idea that observance of the Sabbath preserves the unity of the people. In Nobel's words:

»[For] thousands of years, we have been become its own [to the Sabbath], united indivisibly, entwined by it and entwining it in boundless love« (ibid., p. 112; it is Nobel's words, but they are »worded« by Fromm in terms of social cohesion). Nobel's claim that the liberal rabbis are outlining »a new law of lawlessness« (ibid., p. 110) is formulated by Fromm (1989b, pp. 127–131, 149–151) on the grounds that the liberals have replaced the commitment to the observance of the law with a commitment of believing in a religious dogma. Nobel compares the liberal struggle in law with Paul's struggle. This idea can be found in Fromm's dissertation. Fromm refers to the Christian atmosphere fashioned in the Reform synagogue with the organ and choir, their demand to push the Sabbath rest to Sunday and neglect the Sabbath observance laws.<sup>14</sup> Fromm's critique of the reform movement is reflected even when he points out that some of their leading representatives finally converted (cf. Lundgren 1998, p. 86).

13 In 1912, 61 Liberal rabbis met in Posen and published the *Richtlinien* (The Guidelines) of liberal Judaism. The reaction of the Orthodox rabbis was acute. 111 Orthodox rabbis in Germany, Nobel's colleagues, signed a petition condemning the *Richtlinien*. Nobel, who aspired for unity and renewal in the Jewish world, maintained a tolerant and respectful position and refused to sign the petition. He rejected the Reform ideas but also opposed the separatist way of orthodoxy that divides the Jewish world. His criticism of Reform Judaism was published in an essay that appeared this year under the same headline.

14 Fromm 1989b, pp. 134–136; cf. Nobel 2007, pp. 111 f.; Cohen 1995, pp. 155 f., 359. See also Fromm 1976a, p. 42: »One might ask if it is not time to re-establish the Shabbat as a universal day of harmony and peace, as the human day that anticipates the human future.«

According to Nobel, religion cannot be authentic without morality. However, he claims that the reformers failed to realize that the law is eternal, and that observance of the law in Judaism is not a product of coercion and heteronomy but the result of an internal state of freedom that allowed the Jew to receive God's command autonomously. The law does not restrict the Jew but the Jew keeps the law joyfully and solemnly. Sabbath is not intended to make life difficult as Nobel (2007, p. 120) said: »The Sabbath was the great revelation of divine freedom. For this reason, it became the revelation of human freedom.« This is an idea that specifically appears in Fromm's later writings on the Sabbath. According to Nobel, Paul ruled out the Sabbath because of the severity of its laws. According to Nobel, the strictness of the Sabbath laws was established in response to those who rejected the Sabbath, however, the restrictions themselves encompass the essence of the Sabbath.

In *Das Jüdische Gesetz*, Fromm presents, on one hand, the Sabbath's socio-moral value and its democratic aspect, i.e., the Sabbath is a day of rest for the Torah observers and all their protesters equally (Cohen 1995, p. 157). On the other hand, Fromm presents an approach whereby the full meaning of the Sabbath, in principle, cannot be exhausted through rationalistic approaches (Fromm 1989b, pp. 32, 37 f.). Examples of these are elements of the Sabbath that are beyond the written content of the law: the atmosphere of the Sabbath, the joy and rest that characterize it, and the way the Sabbath-spirit dictates the relation between man and himself, man and others and the environment. This approach apparently developed under the influence of Nobel. The Sabbath rest cannot be reduced to the avoidance of work or effort. Rest expresses harmony and peace.

»On the Sabbath, man ceases completely to be an animal whose main occupation is to fight for survival and to sustain his biological life. On the Sabbath, man is fully man, with no task other to be human.« (Fromm 1966a, pp. 155 f.)

The sacredness of the Sabbath (God's rest) is not only rest and avoidance of the earthly sphere but also a commitment to act in the religious sphere. Sabbath as the »*Krönung der Welt-Schöpfung*« [*»crowning glory of creation«*] (Fromm 1989b, p. 36) is on one hand, breaking the utilitarian connection to the world, and on the other hand, generating a religious connection. There is an analogy between God's rest and the rest of man that forms a religious-spiritual meaning. (See Cohen 1995, p. 156. Concerning Nobel's notion of the Sabbath as the completion of the creation, see Nobel 2007, p. 120.) The law gives rest and the possibility of contemplation. Fromm (1989b, p. 37) writes: »*Only on*

*the basis of this principle the specific instructions of the work prohibitions can be understood.*« (My emphasis) The article *Der Sabbat* expresses a major change in relation to this question. In *Das Jüdische Gesetz* the question: If the Sabbath is a day of rest, how should we clarify restrictions that cause discomfort and burdens? – is not directly and explicitly presented. However, this question opens *Der Sabbat* as well as Fromm's later discussions on the subject.

### ***Der Sabbat* [1927]: Prohibition of work**

Fromm's discussion on the Sabbath develops by answering one key question: If the Sabbath is a day of rest and recovery that is destined for man's welfare, »how can some of the prohibitions that hold for this day, which visibly tend in the opposite direction, be explained?« (Fromm 1927a, p. 8). In other words, how should we understand Sabbath laws and practices and that the observance of them cause discomfort that interferes with the Sabbath rest? How to understand these contradictory trends in the Sabbath institution? To answer this question, Fromm applies »pure Freudian« psychoanalytic-hermeneutical analysis to the Sabbath law.

Sabbath rest in the Bible:

»Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work – you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements.« (Exodus 20:8–10)

»If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, From pursuing your affairs on My holy day; If you call the sabbath ›delight‹.« (Isaiah 58:13)

Sabbath prohibitions:

»Let everyone remain where he is: let no one leave his place on the seventh day.« (Exodus 16:29)

»Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor; you shall cease from labor even at plowing time and harvest time.« (Exodus 34:21)

»You shall kindle no fire throughout your settlements on the Sabbath day.« (Exodus 35:3)

»Once, when the Israelites were in the wilderness, they came upon a man gathering wood on the Sabbath day.« (Numbers 15:32)

»Then the Lord said to Moses, »The man shall be put to death.« (Numbers 15:35)

In my opinion, Fromm's decision to base his discussion on this question is not arbitrary. A question concerning the »burden of law« expresses a desire to match historical Judaism with the changing times. Not only that this question is also relevant for us today (see Kosman 2019, p. 140 fn. 10, pp. 180 f. fn. 125, 129), for example in the socio-political discourse among secular and religious Jews in Israel (see Oron & Ruah-Midbar 2019, pp. 57–80; Statman 1998, pp. 31–45), but that the question also stands at the core of the controversy between reform and orthodox Judaism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In *Das Jüdische Gesetz*, Fromm follows Nobel's criticism of reform Judaism. In it, the question of the »burden of laws« is raised only implicitly (1989b, p. 120, 130). However, the question appears explicitly in all of Fromm's later works dealing with the Sabbath.

In *You Shall be as Gods* Fromm writes:

»Each law is called a mitzvah, which means both duty and command. While the Talmud speaks often of the fact that man must accept the »yoke« of the mitzvot, by the very nature of the law it is not supposed to be felt and, indeed, I believe, has generally not been felt as a burden but as a meaningful way of living.« (Fromm 1966a, p. 151.)

In *Religion of Reason*, Cohen briefly discusses the necessity of accepting the burden of the law with free will. He writes that the burden of the law is

»the yoke of the kingdom of God. [...] whoever has not experienced for himself the life under this yoke of the laws will never understand that this yoke is borne as a ladder to heaven.«<sup>15</sup>

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15 Cohen 1995, p. 386: »This indeed makes private life more difficult; a burden is imposed upon it, but this burden should be the yoke of the kingdom of God. [...] whoever has not experienced for himself the life under this yoke of the laws will never understand that this yoke is borne as a ladder to heaven.« See also *Ibid.*, p. 345: »God commands man,

Indeed, the question about the origin and meaning of the »Yoke of the law« and the »burdensome aspects of the law« does not explicitly appear in Nobel's, Cohen's or Heschel's discussions on the Sabbath. This question is unlikely to arise from a religious person who regards the »Yoke of the law« as a »meaningful way of life« but it deserves to be asked from a researcher's point of view.

The question appears in the Psychoanalytic-Freudian attempt to understand religion and religiousness. Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1912–13, p. 5, 22) opens with the explicit question: How should we understand the »prohibitions of the totemic system« and the »unknown origin« of taboo prohibitions? Freud's studies of the origins of religion have inspired early twentieth century psychoanalytic studies of Jewish rituals. Theodore Reik, in *Probleme der Religionspsychologie: Das Ritual* (1919), asks what the meaning is of »Kol Nidre« (declaring the abrogation of vows and oaths at the beginning of the day of Atonement), and the meaning of the »Shofar«. Reik links those rituals to the »original crime« – the killing of the father-God by the horde of brothers.<sup>16</sup>

The question of the meaning of »the burden of law« that opens *Der Sabbat* also opens Fromm's later essays dealing with the Sabbath. So, in *The Forgotten Language*:

»This is perhaps the most important question – how can we understand the intricacies of the Sabbath ritual in the light of the modern social, hygienic interpretation of rest? In the Old Testament, a man who »gathers sticks« (Num. 15: 32 ff.) is considered a violator of the Sabbath law and punished by death. In the later development not only work in our modern sense is forbidden but activities like the following: making any kind of fire, even if it is for convenience's sake and does not require any physical effort; pulling a single grass blade or flower from the soil; carrying anything, even something as light as a handkerchief, on one's person. All this is not work in the sense of physical effort; its avoidance is often more of an inconvenience and discomfort than the doing of it would be.

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and man in his free will takes upon himself the »yoke of the law«. The law remains a yoke. Even according to Kant's teaching, man is not a volunteer of the moral law, but has to subjugate himself to duty. Thus, the Israelite also must take the yoke upon himself. [...] he also takes upon himself the »Yoke of the Kingdom of God«.

16 Reik offers a psychoanalytic interpretation of various rituals in Judaism: circumcision, the phylacteries (tefillin), the custom of wearing side-locks, the prayer »Kol Nidre«, the »Shofar« and more. See: Beit-Hallahemi 1996, p. 119, 127; Cronbach 1945–1946), pp. 254–256; Cronbach 1931–1932, pp. 605–740. – Karl Abraham (1979, pp. 137–147) supports Reik's interpretation of the Jewish Day of Atonement and offers additional evidence for this explanation. He argues that the Day of Atonement includes a re-acceptance of the »dead father-god!« by his sons and a renewed commitment to him.

Are we dealing here with extravagant and compulsive exaggerations of an originally ›sensible‹ ritual, or is our understanding of the ritual perhaps faulty and in need of revision?« (Fromm 1951a, pp. 243 f.; the same formulation of the question also appears in Fromm 1966a, pp. 153 f.)

Although the wording of this question in the various writings is quite similar, the answer in *Der Sabbat* is different from the answer given in later essays. This is seen in his clarification of the difference between *man's* rest (Exodus 20: 8–10; Deuteronomy 5:12–15) and *God's* rest (Genesis 2: 2–3; Exodus 20:11) on the Sabbath.

In *Der Sabbat*, Fromm argues that the prohibitions on *man's work* indicate that ›the Sabbath originally served as a defense against incestuous tendencies« (Fromm 1927a, p. 10). The idea of *God's rest* demands a more complicated interpretation because (from a theological perspective) the question would be: ›what sort of almost blasphemous image represents God as the first in need of rest after six days of hard work?« (Ibid., p. 9.) ›What does this ›rest‹ mean? Is God pictured in such anthropomorphic terms as to need a rest after six days of hard work?« (Fromm 1966a, p. 153.)

In *Der Sabbat*, the work prohibitions essentially refer to agricultural work. Plowing of the earth is a symbolic expression of sexual intercourse, an ›incestuous subjugation of Mother Earth« (Fromm 1927a, p. 10; cf. Cronbach 1931–32, p. 636). Therefore, the Sabbath prohibitions are a reminiscence of winning the mother. At the same time, Fromm performs a valiant symbolic dance with the claim that God's rest exposes a wish for the father's death. In dream interpretation and in the language of children, sleeping represents death. God's rest on the Sabbath is thus a distant echo of the original meaning of the phrase – eternal rest (rest=death). God's rest is consequently dedicated to raising the memory of the ›original crime«, i.e., the killing of the father-God by the horde of brothers.

In *Der Sabbat*, Fromm refers to the writings of the Assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch (1850–1922), who in *Babel and Bible* (1902, pp. 37 f.) argued for the influence of Babylonian culture on the Bible, namely that the custom of Biblical Sabbath originated in ancient Babylonian legends. The Babylonian ›Sabattu« writes Delitzsch, was a day ›on which no work should be done [...] nor eat of boiled or roasted meats, on which not even a physician should lay hands on the sick« (ibid., p. 38). Sabattu means: ›the day par excellence«; ›the day of the Gods, cessation of work, keeping holiday, A day for quieting the heart of the gods« (ibid., pp. 155). In his historical research, Delitzsch saw no need to clarify the joyful elements of the Hebrew Sabbath. For him, the prohibitions of works are common to both and that indicates a historical connection. He writes:

»We must be thankful that the institution of the Sabbath day, the origin of which was unclear even to the Hebrews themselves, is now recognized as having its roots in the Babylonian Sabattu.« (Ibid., p. 101, 155 f.)

Delitzsch's influence was widespread and continues to our present day. For example, Cohen (1995, pp. 155 f., 192) presents an approach whereby the reasonable and moral development of Monotheism must be understood by the perspective of demythologization. Delitzsch's studies were accepted not only in the world of historical and philosophical research. Nobel, as well, in a Sabbath sermon, mentions this approach. He writes:

»Reading the history of the early Babylonians is enough to prove that the Sabbath in Babylon was a solemn day but full of mourning's signs and much more like a day of repentance and penance than a holiday.« (Nobel 2007.)

Fromm's assertion of a historical approach linking Babylonian myths with the Bible is no exception and is typical of psychoanalytic hermeneutics. He mentions the Babylonian Sabattu in all his later writings on the Sabbath: »the Jewish Sabbath, in contrast to the Babylonian day of rest [which was a day of mourning and self-castigation], has been a day of joy and pleasure« (Fromm 1965z04, p. 141; cf. Fromm 1951a, p. 248).

In *Der Sabbat*, Fromm clarifies the somber character of the Babylonian day of rest (Sabattu) with Freud's »primal crime« narrative from *Totem and Taboo*.<sup>17</sup> The killing of the father-God by the horde of brothers, and the »father-restrictions« that they took upon themselves out of guilt after the act. To Fromm, the application of Freud's theory from *Totem and Taboo* on the Babylonian Sabattu is self-evident. Fromm is following Reik's *Kol Nidre* and Karl Abraham *The Day of Atonement*. Reik and Abraham demonstrate how the ambivalent attitude towards the Father-God appears in the Hebrew prayers. According to Fromm, the ambivalent attitude toward the Father-God in the Bible has been repressed and it echoes in the seemingly ambivalent character of the Sabbath itself.

According to Fromm, (and in this context even without reference to the gloomy character of the Babylonian Sabattu), finding ascetic, somber and self-punishing elements in the Jewish Sabbath law (prohibitions on cooking

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17 Freud's write: »All later religions [after the Totem-religion] are seen to be attempts at solving the same problem. [...] all have the same end in view and are reactions to the same great event with which civilization began and which, since it occurred, has not allowed mankind a moment's rest.« (Freud 1912–13, p. 168.)

and baking, on leaving home or lighting a fire), characteristics of fasting, or prohibitions based on God's rest that their violation is considered as »blasphemy« etc., are indicators of coping with a consciousness of guilt that results from killing the Father-God. He claims that those elements can be found extensively in the Sabbath description of the Jewish Apocrypha from the second century AD (the book Maccabees, and the book of Jubilees), elements that did not last long in Judaism (see Fromm 1927a, p. 8).

Finally, Fromm »needs« Delitzsch's historical studies to explain the joyful aspects of the Hebrew Sabbath. On the Babylonian Sabattu, the »original crime« is not repressed. The Hebrew Sabbath emerged from the negation of the Babylonian myth, replacing the sad and self-punishing aspects with joyful ones. Yet, the gloomy character has remained repressed in the Sabbath and echoes in the inconvenient prohibitions of work. Fromm claims that the »Babylonian« gloomy elements of fasting and penance characterize the day of Atonement that is known in the Bible as »Sabbath of complete rest« (Leviticus 23:32) (see Fromm 1927a, p. 15).

Fromm's conclusion leads to the conventions that there is no real contradiction between the Babylonian Sabattu and the Hebrew Sabbath. That is, the totem religion is the common ground (Gemeinsamkeit des Bodens) for both the Babylonian Sabattu and the Hebrew Sabbath. The »joyful« aspects of the Hebrew Sabbath are merely a product of historical processes of demythologization. These conclusions will not appear in his later essays on the Sabbath.<sup>18</sup>

### **Conclusions: The Sabbath as a day of harmony, or a »new harmony«?**

Fromm's *Der Sabbat* expresses a comprehensive knowledge of the sources of Judaism with well-educated references to Biblical, post-biblical and Halakhic literature. However, Fromm is »scientifically« limiting his investigation to a narrow Freudian hermeneutics. What is noticeable is the lack of discussions on the moral, social and democratic aspects of the Sabbath that characterize the rest of his writings on this topic. *Der Sabbat*, to a minor extent, includes elements that appeared earlier in his dissertation. For example, the connection of the Sabbath to messianism, and the position that a complete understanding

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18 In *Der Sabbat* Fromm believes that his psychoanalytic interpretation contributes also to historical research. In my opinion, this shows a weakness in his article driven by the conservative psychoanalytic approach. In *Das Jüdische Gesetz* and in later writings, Fromm presents an approach whereby the truths of religion stand against developmental historical approaches.

of the Sabbath cannot be exhausted only by rational means. (In my opinion, Freud's approach can be seen as a meta-rational scientific understanding of religion that evolved as a response to the enlightenment's rationalism.) Additionally, *Der Sabbat* includes ideas that will be reflected and expanded in later writings. In fact, apart from the idea that the Sabbath »was originally intended to commemorate the killing of the father« (Fromm 1927, p. 17), almost all other ideas will be developed later.

In later writings, Fromm returns to a socio-theological notion that sees an analogy between God's rest and human freedom and peace. In *The Forgotten Language*, he emphasizes the psychological and philosophical importance of rest. He writes that God »is free and fully God only when he has ceased to work. So is man fully man only when he does not work, when he is at peace with nature and his fellow men; [...] rest is freedom.« (Fromm 1951a, p. 248.)<sup>19</sup>

In *Der Sabbat*, Fromm interprets man's rest, i.e., the prohibition of agricultural work, as a *defense against social-incestuous tendencies* (prohibitions on manipulations on »Mother Earth«). This prevention leads to *harmony* between man and nature – an idea that appears in all his writings on the Sabbath. However, there is a major difference. In *Der Sabbat*, this harmony is a substitutional »day of pleasure« that comes from »regression to the pregenital level« (Fromm 1927a, p. 13). This means a return to the first harmony that existed in paradise before man became knowledgeable, before seeing himself as a separate and free individual (a return to unity with the maternal-body, mother-earth). It is a »substitutional pleasure« because (the forbidden) sexual satisfaction is replaced with the pleasure of not working. In my opinion, the term »harmony« in *Der Sabbat* is somewhat limited to a psycho-mythological one. The Sabbath prohibitions of labor involve »harmony« between man and nature and substitutional pleasure but do not necessarily lead to a development of reason and independence. In my opinion, this limited concept of »Sabbath-harmony« reflects Fromm's decision at that time (1926–1927) to quit the observance of a restrained religious lifestyle.

However, in later writings, Fromm's definition of harmony and of »social incestuous ties« is expanded. First, not only is agricultural work (plowing of »Mother Earth«) a symbol of social-incestuous tendencies. Second, »harmony«

19 See also Fromm 1947a, p. 106: »To Pharaoh, slave labor meant doing things; worshipping God was laziness. The same idea was adopted by all those who wanted to profit from the activity of others and had no use for productiveness, which they could not exploit. [...] Productive work, love, and thought are possible only if a person can be, when necessary, quiet and alone with himself. To be able to listen to oneself is a prerequisite for the ability to listen to others; to be at home with oneself is the necessary condition for relating oneself to others.« – Cf. Braune 2014, p.122.

is being perceived as a higher state of autonomy. Freedom »from the chains of nature and from the chains of time« (Fromm 1951a, p. 245).

In *Psychoanalysis and Religion* Fromm writes:

»The attachment to parents is only one, though the most fundamental, form of incest; in the process of social evolution other attachments in part replace it. The tribe, the nation, the race, the state, the social class, political parties, and many other forms of institutions and organizations become home and family. [...] *It may be said that the development of mankind is the development from incest to freedom.*« (Fromm 1950a, p. 81.)<sup>20</sup>

In *You Shall Be as Gods*, Fromm emphasizes the necessity of independence from incestuous fixations such as blood, soil, mother and clan: »Man is feeble and weak [...]. He needs to be obedient to God so that he can break his fixation to the primary ties and not submit to man.« (Fromm 1966a, p. 59, 62.) In his social-psychoanalysis, freedom means

»[...] for man to be fully born, that is, to become fully human, he must cut the umbilical cord – that which connects him with his mother as well as that which connects him with his family and his soil. But the cutting of his incestuous ties is not enough. Man cannot be fully human of he is not free from man.« (Fromm 1966a, p. 147.)

Sabbath symbolizes this freedom from incest even if »only for one day a week« (Fromm 1951a, p. 245). In *The Forgotten Language*, he speaks of *new harmony* without referring explicitly to the *Der Sabbat's* pregenital »old« harmony. He writes that the »new harmony is different from that of paradise [...] The original, pre-individualistic harmony« (ibid., p. 246). The new harmony can be achieved by disobedience to irrational authorities, by freedom from the bondage of irrational passions and by the development of power of reason. Unlike *Der Sabbat*, in later writings, Fromm writes that the Sabbath symbolizes a state of complete harmony that is expressed in the prophetic concept of peace, i.e., overcoming of separateness and alienation (see also Fromm 1960d).

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20 See also *The Sane Society*: »Identification with a group (as found in nationalism) is a substitute for »true« identity, and represents a regression to an earlier stage of cultural development. [...] Nationalism is our form of incest, is our idolatry, is our insanity.« (Fromm 1955a, p. 67.) According to Fromm, incest is expressed at the social level: nationalism, patriotism, etc. He calls this incest a modern idolatry.

In *Der Sabbat*, a short paragraph links the Sabbath to the prophetic messianic idea. However, Fromm presents this idea as a utopian return to paradise. He interprets the prophetic vision in Freudian terms. Man was expelled from paradise and was punished with the necessity of labor because he wanted to be like the Father-God. In the messianic time, man will return to paradise and will not have to work, which means that man will be able »to win the mother« again and return to the »old« (pregenital) harmony.

In all other writings, the connection of Sabbath to the messianic time is a positive one. In *You Shall Be as Gods*, he writes that

»the reason why the Sabbath has so central place within Jewish law lies in the fact that the Sabbath is the expression of the central idea of Judaism: the idea of freedom: the idea of complete harmony between man and nature, man and man; the idea of the anticipation of the messianic time and of man's defeat of time, sadness, and death.« (Fromm 1966a, p. 153.)

In *The Forgotten Language* (Fromm 1951a, p. 247), he writes: »The Sabbath is not only the symbolic anticipation of the messianic time but is considered its real precursor.«

In this context, it is interesting to mention that Fromm tries to link the idea of a universal God as x-element with the particular Jewish concept of the Sabbath. In *Der Sabbat*, Fromm's concept of God is subjected to Freud's Father-God concept (which is, indeed, a universal one, a God of the Totem religion), whereas in *You Shall Be as Gods*, God is »one of many different poetic expressions of the highest value in humanism« (Fromm 1966a, p. 18), an »x-element« that can be found in all religions, philosophical and mystical systems. In contrast to *Idol*, the x-element represents the possibility of achieving freedom. »Obedience to God is also the negation of submission to man«, and »God's authority thus guarantees man's independence from human authority« (ibid., pp. 73–75; Fromm 1950a, p. 49).

In light of this, on one hand, the Sabbath is a particular Jewish-day: »The Sabbath is the most important of the biblical concepts [...] It is the only strictly religious command in the Ten Commandments.« (Fromm 1976a, p. 42.) The Sabbath is the only »new commandment« that actually distinguishes between the (universal) seven Noachite commandments and the Ten Commandments (Fromm 1966a, p. 149 fn.). On the other hand, Fromm emphasizes the universal aspect of the Sabbath as »a universal day of harmony and peace«. In my opinion, this contradiction in Fromm's writings is not satisfactorily settled.

In all his writings on Sabbath, Fromm focuses on the practical rather than abstract or faith-based aspects. The Sabbath laws are not based on religious

dogmas. This topic is highlighted in his dissertation, appears indirectly in *Der Sabbat* and continues throughout his writings.

*Der Sabbat*, indeed, expresses Fromm's departure from the religious lifestyle of observance, and more precisely, from performing religious rituals. Fromm opposes the superficial, mechanical (authoritarian) approach to the practice of rituals and religious laws. This trend will be strengthened and it shows some resemblance to Martin Buber and a distance from Heschel's approach. In *You Shall Be as Gods*, he writes about the »authentic form« of the Sabbath. »Whoever thinks that he knows what the Sabbath is because he has seen the candles lit has little idea of the atmosphere the traditional Sabbath creates.«<sup>21</sup>

*Der Sabbat* is his early scientific attempt, and certainly a speculative one, to answer contradictions in Sabbath laws. Fromm is doing it by finding correlations between Judaism and Freud's (archaic and universal) Totem-religion, as it is historically mediated by ancient Babylonian religion. In my opinion, this can be seen, methodologically, as an anticipative hint to the eclectic approach that will characterize Fromm's attitude toward religion and religiousness in his future writings. As there are totemic sources for all religions (according to Fromm's *Der Sabbat*), there are eternal and wise truths in all religions (in later writings).

In my opinion, Fromm saw himself as a Jewish thinker. *Der Sabbat* represents a shift from the perspective of an orthodox Jew to a perspective of an »orthodox Freudian«. Yet, *Der Sabbat* should not be understood as bringing Fromm closer to the Jewish reform movement or any other specific religious group. *Der Sabbat* expresses a departure from automatic acceptance of an identity of a national-religious group, similar to his departure from the Zionist youth organization in 1922. Both cases can be seen as overcoming his socio-cultural incestuous ties. In my opinion, his dissertation and his late socio-psychological hermeneutics represent a religious »orthodox mood« of evaluating the social reality with psycho-theological terms. That means truths from religions stand against the materialism and alienation of modern culture. I believe that in a later period, Fromm saw the meaning of the Sabbath as a concrete implementation of the prophets' messianic vision of peace in man's life. Possibly he saw correlations between Sabbath-rest and Buddhist meditation, something he practiced daily for many years of his life.

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21 Fromm 1966a, pp. 152 f. Compare to Heschel 1994, p. 66: »When all work is brought to a standstill, the candles are lit. Just as creation began with the word, ›Let there be light!‹ so does the celebration of creation begin with the kindling of lights. It is the woman who ushers in the joy and sets up the most exquisite symbol, light, to dominate the atmosphere of the home. [...] candles nodding dreamily to unutterable expectations, to intuitions of eternity...«

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