

Saturday for Jews: Innovation & Extremes

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ABSTRACT

This research paper analyses the reality of Jews' self-created divine Saturday and its obligation which has proved themselves as a mismatch to human nature and thus, caused deviations in their religion. This research work targets to understand the reasons, and motives of self-created righteousness to outline a possible solution. It is aimed to highlight the damages caused due to self-created righteousness, by discussing the problems Jews are struggling with, till today in practising Saturday obligations. Even after thousands of years, Jews are unable to find the balance to work out these undivine obligations of Saturday. When we analyse, we see that blind following of deviated leaders and not knowing the original divine text, are the key problems that give rise to such false beliefs. We see that Muslims are on the same track, putting obligations not defined by Islam and facing the same dilemma. The study has shown that the problem can be resolved by providing the knowledge of original divine text to common people. This will give them the ability to reassess their beliefs and will provide them with the intellect required to reject the false ones. This study provides the direction and recommendations to develop an educational system that will bring the masses out of this dilemma towards correct beliefs that harmonise with their inner-self.

Keywords: *Sabbath; Jews; Friday; Innovations; Extremes.*

INTRODUCTION

Human history is evident that religion has remained a strong part of the identity of mankind. (Religion & Identity, 2020) Confusion in religion creates confusion in identity and extremism. (Villani, 2019) Religion is a way of life that should be based on instructions provided through

divine inspiration. Whenever the criteria are changed it becomes a source of disturbance within human nature and in whole societies. This research article explores this phenomenon and provides an understanding of invented religious obligations taking the example of the Sabbath and its obligations. It explains that even if followed for generations it remained a matter of dispute.

All religions are based on some ground rules that are defined by their leader, either based on self-learning or divine inspiration and text. If followed as defined, we should see the followers in harmony, but it is seen in all religions that a number of different modes of practice exist. If we take the example of Christianity, we see groups like Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestants (Museum Media Library) and if we turn towards Judaism, we see Haredi (“ultra-Orthodox”), Dati (“religious”), Masorti (“traditional”) and Hiloni (“secular”). (Kelsey, 2016) These differences are evidence that the followers alter the ground rules and make the changes an essential part of their religion and thus get divided. This paper aims to understand this phenomenon of inventions in religious obligation, its reasons, and possible cure. The example of the Sabbath of Jews has been studied in detail to see the real picture behind invented religious obligations.

CASE STUDY: SABBATH - AN INVENTED RELIGIOUS OBLIGATION

Sabbath means to rest, it is taken from Latin *sabbatum*, through Greek from Hebrew *šabbāt*, from *šāḇat*, which stands for ‘to rest’. It is a religious day in which Moses’s followers’ abstinence themselves from work. The Jews take Saturdays as Sabbath day. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary) Sabbath is a deeply rooted belief and is called the most important belief in Judaism. It is claimed that it was ordained for them by their Lord. Exodus 20:8-10 says, “*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. You are to labour six days and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. You must not do any work--you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, your livestock, or the resident alien who is within your city gates.*” As we study the Sabbath belief, we see that it is based on an invented belief that after doing all the work, God rested on the seventh day of the week. (Genesis 2:1-3). This base belief in the Sabbath ignores the fact that God is Perfect, He does not get tired, and He does not need to rest. *The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.* (Isaiah 40:28-31) The divine attributes of God contradict the Sabbath, thus, proving that it is a self-invented belief. This has been recognised in the Jewish community as well but accepted by only a few. Dr. Rabbi Rifat Sonsino

wrote, “Where did the biblical Israelites get the idea of a weekly day of rest?⁹ The origin of the word “Shabbat” is obscure. Various scholarly theories have been advanced to resolve the puzzle, with none being totally satisfactory”. (Sonsino, 2014) Calculating Sabbath using the Gregorian calendar, also has no basis in the religious text. In Moses' time when Sabbath is claimed to be given the calculation was based on the lunar calendar. (Dawn, 2023) Isaiah 66:23 states, “From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,” says the Lord.

So, there are several confusions about the Sabbath’s origin, calculation, and application. (Britannica) We see that no clear instructions are found in their religious text when it comes to defining the “work” that the followers are not supposed to do. In Judaism, the religious rulings are derived from the five books of Moses which are not preserved in their original state. This fact is accepted by the Jews themselves. Rabbi Tzvi Freeman explained it in an article as follows: “I have to agree with you that there is no scientifically flawless proof that the Torah we have today is exactly what Moses wrote.” He denied the importance of divine text later in the same article by saying, “Nevertheless, anyone resting their faith on historical evidence of facts alone is building a home on the swampy banks of the Mississippi. Faith cannot be based on evidence of an event of the past, no matter how strong the evidence may be. Faith arises out of your personal life experience.”

Even if we ignore this fact for a while and study the Sabbath from Israelites’ religious text, we see an unclear command that has been transgressed multiple times since it was given. A command from God is given to be followed thus, He makes it clear without doubts through His Prophets and Books. But we see that the Sabbath has always remained a dispute between Israelites. Dr. Joseph R. Nally stated in an explanation of Mark 2:27-28, “As to the first point, the Pharisees had made the Sabbath a burden. They placed ungodly restrictions upon God's people (cg. Matt. 23:4, 13; Luke 11:46) which weren't included within God's law (Exod. 20:8-11; 31:14-17; Lev. 23:3; Deut. 5:12-15).” Below are only a few examples:

1. The Talmud describes a debate about whether it is permitted to lay out nets to catch fish and other animals before Shabbat to catch them on Shabbat. Beit Shammai says that it is forbidden, and Beit Hillel says that it is permitted.
2. Mark 2:23-27. *One Sabbath, Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, “Look,*

why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” He answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.” Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

3. Mark 3:4. *Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent.*

The above-mentioned cases from different religious texts show that Jewish religious leaders were unable to define the boundaries of “work”, what is permitted and what is not. Both Prophet David and Jesus did not follow the invented obligations of Sabbath and highlighted for Jewish religious leaders their wrong understanding, explained by Dr. Joseph R. Nally in Mark 2:27-28

SABBATH - EFFECTS & DAMAGES

Even today, it is a problematic decision what is “work” and what is not. From a Rabbinic perspective, to light a torch from an already burning one is prohibited. (Britannica) Similarly, using different modern machines is prohibited including turning on the lights, igniting the motor of a car, pressing the elevator button, turning on ovens and using a pen, recording, photographing, and so on. As humans are born with needs, if you put such unnatural obligations, they create inefficient solutions. We see several such examples in Jews:

- “*Sabbath mode*” appliances with disabled automatic shut-off function and stay functioning all Sabbath so it can be used without turning it on, and
- “*Sabbath elevators*” which automatically go to the highest level and stop at each floor without pressing a button,
- “*Sabbath lights*” that run on timers and other such energy-wasting solutions.

Although Jews are inventing solutions “*not to work*” on Sabbath, modern-day life requirements are in constant clash with Sabbath restrictions. Even when they bring dodgy solutions like Sabbath elevators, the Rabbis declare it “severely prohibited”. As a result of this unclarity and the constant struggle to define and redefine Sabbath obligations, the majority has left practising it. A survey in New York showed that only less than 40 percent follow Sabbath practices and even they follow it only 19-20%.

These undivine unreasonable restrictions made them take extreme measures and construct wasteful solutions. In early times a man was stoned to death for collecting wood on

Sabbath. (Numbers 15:32-36) In an expedition, their Prophet had to pray for the Sun to stop setting as the next day was Saturday. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated: *The sun has never been stopped from running in its orbit for any human being except for Yūsha‘ ibn Nūn (the servant of Moses, who travelled with him to Al-Khidr), when he marched to Jerusalem. He feared that the sun would set before he could enter the city on Friday. If the sun had set, he would enter on Saturday, on which fighting was forbidden. So, he said to the sun: "You are commanded, and so am I. O Allah, hold it (from setting)." So the sun stopped for him until he entered Jerusalem.* (Encyclopedia of Translated Prophetic Hadiths: 10998) Before Jesus came in the Maccabean Period, Jews were attacked on the Sabbath, and 1000 were slaughtered because they were respecting the Sabbath and did not defend themselves. (Gospels Controversy) In recent times a reporter was spitted and hit for using a tape recorder on Sabbath. (Singham 2009) Centuries have passed but Israelites are in confusion about the Sabbath.

THE REAL DIVINE LAW

The study of the Israelites' religious text and the present-day issues of Jews, portrays a complex situation of the Sabbath which makes it evident that something is wrong with Sabbath belief and its understanding. Either the whole concept is invented, or it has been altered to the extent that it lost its true essence.

To understand its reality, we turn to the last divine text, the Quran, and the saying of the last Prophet (peace be upon him) because it is an accepted fact that the Quran is in its original form as it was given to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The latest finding of the University of Birmingham has confirmed this fact again. They have performed radiocarbon analysis on parchments of the Quran and found them dating back to 568 to 645 AD which means Prophetic times. These parchments are the same as what Muslims hold today. When we study the Quran to understand the given divine law about any specific weekday (which should not be called Sabbath), we find out that it is not Saturday or Sunday, but it is Friday which has been given to believers as a day to remember their Lord with no demand of not doing work the whole day. We can see this as the ruling of Friday has been given to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as well, Ch. 62 of the Quran states:

O you who have believed, when [the adhan] is called for the prayer on the day of Jumu'ah [Friday], then proceed to the remembrance of Allah and leave trade. That is better for you if you only knew. And when the prayer has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah, and remember Allah often that you may succeed. (62: 9-10)

Allah has sent every Prophet with the information about Friday and its excellence.

Abu Huraira reported the Messenger of Allah as saying: The best day on which the sun has risen is Friday; on it, Adam was created. on it he was made to enter Paradise, on it he was expelled from it. And the last hour will take place on no day other than Friday." (Sahih Muslim 854b)

Prophet Moses was given the same ruling but when he informed Israelites that they should take Friday as Remembrance Day, they refused. They augmented that Allah has created everything in six days and on the seventh day which is Saturday according to them, He rested, and everything worshipped Him. (Exodus 20:11) So, we are going to take Saturday as our rest and worship day. As Allah has mentioned:

The Sabbath was only appointed for those who differed over it. (The Quran; 16:124)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has explained it as follows:

It was narrated that Abū Hurairah said: "The Messenger of Allah said: 'Allah led those who came before us astray from Friday. Saturday was for the Jews and Sunday was for the Christians. (Sunan Ibn Majah 1083)

When they disagreed to follow Friday and insisted on taking Saturday as the day of worship and claimed that if they were given Saturday, they would devote themselves to worship, not do any worldly tasks, Allah tested them. We find details of it in the Quran, chapter 7 which tells about a group of Israelites who settled near a shore and adopted fishing as their way of living. They took Saturday as their Sabbath day meaning worshipping without any worldly task as fishing on that day. To show them their reality, Allah tested them with an easy catch. Fishes started to come on the surface on Saturdays, more in quantity than any other day. Following the claimed Sabbath practice, they should not have gone to the shore to examine the fishes but due to their immense love for the riches of this world, their concentration was at the shore on Saturdays too. They got attracted by the fishes and laid nets on Friday evenings to catch the fish on Saturday. They tried to dodge the self-laid Sabbath commitment and played smart that they were not fishing on Saturday. They knew they were targeting the Saturday fishes which were forbidden for them. A few of them tried to warn the others. The community was divided into three groups, one group boldly set the nets on Friday evenings and caught the trapped fishes on Sunday, the second group did not lay nets but remained quiet about this breach of law, the third group obeyed the commitment and called others to follow it too. When everyone exhibited their belief from their deeds, Allah sent His punishment and it fell on the first two groups and they were made apes and the third group who obeyed and called towards the right, were saved.

Allah showed them the consequences of self-invented obligations. They should have taken their learnings from this event and should have repented and turned to the originally given law of

Friday. But they persisted and removed this event of trapping Saturday fishes from their history and carried on with their self-invented Sabbath obligations. When we study the history of Israelites, we can only find traces of this event in the debate section of Talmud where a very specific discussion has been made depicting the occurrence of this event. Seeing their pride, as they called themselves the children of God, claimed Paradise is only for them, one can understand that to prove their self-righteousness, they wanted to keep the Sabbath, so they had to remove this event from their history. But for a truth seeker, Allah has described the event of Sabbath breakers in the Quran that Israelites cannot erase.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

History is evident that humans have an urge to please their Lord. All past civilizations had their ways of expressing their connection with their Lord. (Shah 2014) If the correct knowledge to worship gets distorted, the masses turn towards the wrong with full sincerity. Even if it keeps clashing with their nature, they cling to it to prove themselves righteous. The study of invented religious obligations of Saturday of Jews has shown how deep-rooted such invented practices become if not corrected. This is not a problem of any specific religion, but such invented obligations are found in all religions. If we see Muslims, we find a number of examples like invented ways of worship in specific months, invented ways of worship on death, birth, and marriage, Celebrations of the Prophet's Birthday, and so on. (Islam QA)

REASONS FOR INVENTED RELIGIOUS OBLIGATIONS

The inventors in the pursuit of self-righteousness give more value to their invented obligations and keep dragging them after centuries and generations. The individual having the problem of self-righteousness feels himself superior to others which causes self-deceiving and arrogance. (Seltzer 2021) Such invented ways of worship damage the spirit to follow the religion and the coming generation leaves the true religion. Thus, it becomes essential to understand the reasons behind it so a solution can be outlined. By analysing the Sabbath case, we find that the following factors are the main reasons for invented obligations:

- Falling for little benefit

The gains of this world have been one of the biggest reasons for man since the beginning to deviate from the clear given instructions. Once he develops a love for it, even if warned he creates excuses and falls for it again and again. While discussing the Sabbath breakers in Quran Ch. 7 Allah has mentioned: *And there followed them successors who inherited the Scripture [while]*

taking the commodities of this near life and saying, "It will be forgiven for us." And if an offer like it comes to them, they will [again] take it. (7:169)

- Misunderstandings about their Lord

Man takes divine guidance with a heart full of desire for this world and thus misunderstands, misinterprets, and even changes the given instructions. In his love for this world, he relates things to Allah that are untrue. This causes permanent damage to his faith as he then ignores the meeting and accountability of the Last Day. Thus, deviates himself, others, and the coming generations. The verse 7:169 further states: *Was not the covenant of the Scripture taken from them that they would not say about Allah except the truth, and they studied what was in it? And the home of the Hereafter is better for those who fear Allah, so will you not use reason?*⁹ (7:169)

- Leaving the Divine Book

After the Prophet (peace be upon him), the divine text is the only thing that can bring one back to the straight path. But as the divine Book condemns their desired ways, they gradually ignore and leave the Book behind in pursuit of the charms of this world. The knowledge ones alter divine text for the fulfilment of their wishes and the unlettered ones follow it for their wishes. By leaving the way of their Lord, they trap themselves in a place where they have to invent ways to prove their self-righteousness. This results in self-invented obligations which neither make them better humans nor help them to utilise their resources positively. The Quran states: *And among them are unlettered ones who do not know the Scripture except in wishful thinking, but they are only assuming. So, woe to those who write the "scripture" with their own hands, then say, "This is from Allah," in order to exchange it for a small price. Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn. (2:78-79)*

- Taking wrong role model

Allah highlights that people deviate as they take wrong ideals and role models. When the desires develop, the role models change accordingly. Although having clear instructions and the best role models, people turn towards the wrong ones who show them the path of their desires. While reflecting on the Sabbath followers, Allah mentioned: *Then We revealed to you, [O Muhammad], to follow the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth; and he was not of those who associate with Allah. (16:123)*

- Placing reason over divine wisdom

Allah has given man intellect, an ability to learn, reason, and apply. As long as man keeps this ability under divine guidance it helps him to stay on the right path but if he puts it above divine wisdom it leads him astray. We have seen in the example of Sabbath that the Israelites brought reason to subside the given wisdom and thus went astray. *The sabbath was only appointed for*

those who differed over it. And indeed, your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that over which they used to differ. (16:124)

THE WAY OUT OF INVENTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

Realising the reality of this test and knowing about the Lord are the two key factors that can help one to come out of this self-created problem. Both of these targets can be achieved by returning to the unaltered divine text. Only the unaltered divine text from the Creator with perfect and complete knowledge, can tell the true reality of things and the results of deeds. People in following their desires change the Books of Allah after the Prophets. The unavailability of correct knowledge becomes the dominant reason for invented practices in the masses. The Prophets are humans, so it is not possible for them to stay alive till the Last Day. Thus, Allah promised to protect the last complete message, the Quran: *We have sent down the Reminder, and We will preserve it.* (Surah Al-Hijr 15:9) And that is the reason it is in its original form after approx. 1400 years.

If we analyse it in terms of belief, we can see that correct belief in Allah's Books and His Messengers plays a vital role in having a correct understanding of religion and keeping one on the right path. The Books and the Messengers are representors of Allah in the seen world when one holds firm to them, he stays straight and strengthens his belief in his unseen Lord, Allah. He does not need to invent to feel righteous, and thus does not deviate and fall into confusion and extremes.



Knowing reality through an unaltered divine complete text gives a person the ability to make correct decisions and analyse the effects of his deeds. Thus, it provokes him to correct himself and give the direction to come out of invented righteousness. With correct knowledge, it is essential to have the right role model so knowledge can be applied in the right direction. Thus knowing the way of Prophets provides the lucid examples to be followed to achieve the straight path to personal and collective success.

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