Shabbat: A Journey of Personal and Global Discovery

Warren Goldstein June 26, 2023

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Writing *Shabbat. A Day to Create Yourself* was a unique experience for me.

With other books I've written, I've known the direc-

tion the book would take from the beginning. From there, it was a matter of crystallizing those thoughts and ideas into the written word – not a simple process.

The journey of writing *Shabbat. A Day to Create Yourself* took its own path.. Rather than a calculated, deliberative process, the idea for the book emerged from my sense of wonder at the way in which the Shabbat Project took off, first in South Africa, and then across the world.

The Shabbat Project is a call for Jews everywhere, of all backgrounds, to join together to keep one Shabbat. It began in South Africa in 2013, before spreading to hundreds of cities worldwide. Today, it is celebrated in more than 1,500 cities and over 100 countries, driven by thousands of volunteer partners on the ground.

Witnessing this global grassroots movement take shape had a profound impact on me. I was faced with many questions. How does Shabbat inspire and bring together Jews of all levels of observance? What is the secret power and beauty of this day that has captivated Jews for generations? What makes Shabbat so compelling for us today?

And so, I began delving into sources, trying to puzzle out the meaning of Shabbat, in order to understand the Shabbat Project phenomenon for myself. It became a journey of discovery, and gradually, a book emerged from these explorations.

You'll see in the bibliography that there are more than 200 books which have informed my personal journey, bringing to light dimensions of Shabbat I never knew existed. I say that as a rabbi who has studied and taught the laws of Shabbat for many years. But *Shabbat. A Day to Create Yourself* is about understanding the deeper significance of Shabbat — the spirit, vision, and values of Shabbat which are intertwined with these laws and emerge from them.

In time, I began to see Shabbat from a completely different perspective. I learned that the Divine gift of Shabbat goes beyond the simple kindness of God granting us a day of complete rest from the demands of daily life,although that gift cannot be underestimated, especially in today's frenzied times.

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Shabbat we create *our-selves*.

I discovered bigger, grander ideas – how Shabbat can unleash personal and societal renewal; how it offers us a Divine recipe for happiness in an increasingly complex world; how Shabbat gives us the tools to create the best version of ourselves and our world, reminding us that our most important accomplishments in life cannot be measured .

The title refers to one overarching idea: during the week we create the world around us, during Shabbat we create *ourselves*.

This idea—that Shabbat can be a catalyst for self-transformation—is, I believe, a fresh way of looking at Shabbat, and yet it's deeply rooted in our ancient sources.

The style of *Shabbat. A Day to Create Yourself* is also totally different to my other books. The ideas are encapsulated in short, easy-to-digest chapters, with the source references appearing as endnotes to each chapter, so that the reader can enjoy the text first and then delve into the sources if they wish. In general, rather than something you simply read and

put back on the shelf when you're done, the book lends itself to discussion and contemplation. It's a book that spurs action and that sparks public discussion.

It is for this reason that *Shabbat. A Day to Create Yourself* is being accompanied by new book clubs, most of which have been set up by Shabbat Project volunteer partners around the world (the book has been translated into three languages, with a global distribution network to mirror the Shabbat Project network).

These book clubs involve groups of people from all backgrounds meeting up on a regular basis to read and discuss the book, exchange insights and ideas, and share their Shabbat experiences.

In my home country of South Africa, there are businesses that have set up Friday afternoon learning groups, and young mothers and daughters who have undertaken to read the book together after candle-lighting every Friday evening.

The goal is to start a public conversation about Shabbat–to demonstrate that it has answers to our greatest challenges, and can pave the way to a bright Jewish future.

This has been the driving vision of the Shabbat Project and its thousands of volunteers in communities across the Jewish world – and it is the driving vision of this book.

Ultimately, I hope you will find *Shabbat. A Day to Create Yourself* as eye-opening to read as it was for me to write – and that it enhances your enjoyment and appreciation of the precious gift delivered with Divine love at sunset every Friday.

Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein is the current Chief Rabbi of South Africa and a global Jewish leader. Affectionately referred to as 'Chief' and a 'spiritual entrepreneur' he has launched and led a number of innovative social projects with global reach and impact. Locally, his Bill of Responsibilities – adopted by the Department of Education and taught in schools nationwide – has shown a new generation of young South Africans the importance of compassion, and respect for the dignity and wellbeing of others. CAP, a unique community-driven crime-fighting initiative that protects 30,000 homes and upwards of 250,000 people, and has reduced contact crime in its area of operation by between 80 and 90 percent and Sinai Indaba, the largest annual Torah convention of its

kind. Two of his local projects have been embraced and championed by world-jewry: Generation Sinai, an annual family learning experience as well as The Shabbat Project which unites Jews annually in over 1000 cities on an unprecedented scale. The youngest person to ever be elected to the position, Chief Rabbi Goldstein is a strong advocate for creative, proactive leadership and effective partnership to find unique solutions to the challenges of our time. He has featured on The Algemeiner's top 100 People Positively Influencing Jewish Life multiple times and has a regular study session with South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa. He is an executive member of South Africa's National Religious Leaders Council, through which he is involved with strengthening inter-faith relations in the country between Jews, Christian, Muslims, Hindus and other faiths, as well as engaging with the government on national policy matters. A qualified Jewish law judge, Rabbi Goldstein has published several books including African Soul Talk: When Politics is not Enough (with Dumani Mandela); Defending the Human Spirit: Jewish Law's Vision for a Moral Society; Sefer Mishpat Tzedek (a detailed analysis of Torah business law and ethics, with particular focus on competition law); and The Legacy: Teachings for Life from the Great Lithuanian Rabbis (with Rabbi Berel Wein).

The Chief Rabbi has a PhD in Human Rights and Constitutional Law and is a regular columnist for the Jerusalem Post and aish .com.

https://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/pb-daily/shabbat-a-journey-of-personal-and-global-discovery