

When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a Sabbath of Adonai. Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the land shall have a Sabbath of complete rest, a Sabbath of Adonai.

(Leviticus 25:2-4)

The sabbatical is an essential part of the life cycle of the rabbi. It provides the rabbi with opportunities for renewal and study and growth that would not otherwise be possible. It helps prevent burnout. It allows for the time and space a rabbi needs to take care of her well-being as a person. A rabbi returning from sabbatical can bring new focus and energy and vision to the congregation.

Length of the Sabbatical

Based on the sabbatical year of the Torah the normal expectation is that the sabbatical will be a year long. In practice the length will depend upon the rabbi's needs including consideration for family and congregation. The rabbi should begin to work out the details for the sabbatical in consultation with the congregation as far in advance as possible to allow for all necessary arrangements.

Options for sabbaticals:

- a full year
- a modified year (close of Simchat Torah until one month before Rosh Hashanah)
- 6 months
- 4 months – this could be taken for several consecutive years
- 3 months – this could be taken for several consecutive years
- 10 weeks every summer for an agreed to number of years

Sabbaticals usually take place in the 7th year and at 7 year increments. The sabbatical is best timed when it is not the next-to-last or the last year of a contract unless an agreement has been reached for at least two years after the rabbi returns from sabbatical

Salary and Benefits

- full year – 2/3 salary
- modified year – 3/4 salary
- 6 months or shorter segments – full salary for each segment

All benefits are maintained during any sabbatical period and the sabbatical usually does not count against vacation or sick leave or personal leave or parenting leave. Vacation should not be taken within the first few months from returning to the congregation. A calendar for the sabbatical and for vacation time may need to be created for the sabbatical year to meet the needs of the rabbi and the congregation.

Planning

The first and most important step for proper planning is to create a calendar for the time the rabbi will be away which indicates when the congregation needs/wants a rabbi. This will help determine which budget and coverage options could best work.

- **possible budget sources**
 - capital budget
 - operating budget
 - a dedicated sabbatical fund
- **possible coverage options**
 - rabbi
 - rabbinic intern
 - laypeople
- **advance notice**
 - families with life-cycle events need to know as far in advance as possible so they can plan accordingly
- **communicate**
 - the congregation should know as far in advance as possible about the sabbatical - what will be happening in the congregation during the sabbatical period including who will be covering the various aspects of the rabbi's position
- **the sabbatical for the congregation**
 - can be a year with what is familiar and comfortable or it can be an opportunity to experiment with some new programs or a little of both
- **create a blog or journal for the rabbi**
 - the rabbi can then find out what is going on or what happened in the community

This can be a very rewarding period for the rabbi and congregation. Both can come out of this experience stronger and more understanding and supportive of each other.