

1. The Holiness of Shabbat

גִּוּדְלֵי קְדוּשַׁת הַשַּׁבָּת

1. Shabbat is the foundation of our faith.

It is both a sign so that we may know, and a covenant to reaffirm, that in six days, *Hashem* created heaven and earth and all that is in our world, and that He rested on the seventh day. In emphasizing its fundamental magnitude, *Chazal* stated that Shabbat is equal to all the other commandments (*Yerushalmi Nedarim* 3:9). When you observe Shabbat properly it is as though you have fulfilled the whole Torah, and if you desecrate Shabbat, God forbid, it is as though you have denied the whole Torah. This idea is expressed in the Book of *Nechemiah*, as it is written, “You came down upon Mount Sinai ... and gave them right ordinances and laws of truth, good statutes and commandments; and You made known unto them your holy Shabbat” (*Nechemiah* 9:13,14).¹

1. **Shabbat Is Equal to All the *Mitzvot*** The juxtaposition in this verse of Shabbat to the laws of the Torah given at Mount Sinai is taken by *Chazal* as indicating that the observance of Shabbat is equal to that of all the other commandments. A similar view is held by *Chazal* regarding the prohibition of idolatry, which is likewise taken to be equal to all of the commandments, as intimated in the verse, “And when you shall err and not observe all these commandments which the Lord has spoken to Moshe” (*Bamidbar* 15:22). The “error” referred to, the Rabbis note in *Horayot* (8a), is idolatry, a transgression that is tantamount to abandoning God and forsaking

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2. Whoever desecrates Shabbat willfully, contemptibly, and publicly is regarded as an idolater² in every respect.³ If such a person touches wine or cooks food, it is forbidden like that touched or cooked by an idolater.⁴ It is considered a public desecration of Shabbat if the violation occurs in the presence of ten Jews, or even if they know of the violation without actually witnessing it.

3. *Yeshayahu HaNavi* praises the person who observes Shabbat, saying, “Fortunate is the man who will do this and the person who will hold fast to it, he who keeps Shabbat from profaning it and guards his hand from doing any evil” (*Yeshayahu* 56:2). If you observe Shabbat

His commandments. Desecration of the Shabbat, therefore, is further equated with idolatry (*Erwin* 69b), since both involve a denial of God, the Creator, and His Torah; see the following notes for further discussion of this status.

2. **Someone Who Desecrates Shabbat** In theory, someone who desecrates Shabbat is considered an idolater with regard to all the restrictions imposed upon one who engages in such conduct, such as being disqualified from serving as a *shochet*, a ritual slaughterer. It does not, however, free him or her from any religious duties or obligations. For example, the marriage of non-Shabbat observant people cannot be dissolved without a *get*, a bill of divorce, etc.; see below for the application of this status in our times.
3. **Someone Raised in a Non-Observant Home** In the opinion of many *poskim*, only one who habitually and knowingly desecrates Shabbat and shows no concern for its observance is regarded as an idolater, but not someone who is unaware of the severity of transgressing and desecrating Shabbat. Someone who grew up in a non-observant home, therefore, where he or she was not taught to keep Shabbat, is not to be regarded as an idolater if he or she violated any Shabbat laws, since such a person is not acting out of malice towards *Hashem*, but from habit.
4. **Non-Observant Jews in Our Times** Many *poskim* take a strict view of Shabbat violators, and apply all the restrictions relating to a non-Jew with regards to the wine such a person handles, the bread he bakes, and the food he cooks. Others, however, are lenient, maintaining that non-observance of Shabbat can not be considered a denial of faith in our day. Indeed, many Shabbat violators recite Shabbat prayers and say *Kiddush*, and observe other basic Jewish practices. It is difficult to say of such people that they deny the existence of *Hashem*, God forbid, when they observe many other fundamental tenets of Judaism. Due to the general decline in religious observance, these *poskim* deem it best not to reject non-Shabbat observers altogether, so that they might remain connected to their people and faith; see below, Part IV, Chapter 10, note 15.

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properly,⁵ honoring it and delighting in it according to your ability, you are assured by the prophet of your reward in this world, besides the great

5. **Shabbat and the International Date Line** Since the earth is round and revolving, the sun sets at some place on earth at every moment. While the rotation of the earth dictates the beginning of a night and the end of a day, it does not dictate what day of the week has begun. Think about the following: suppose that you are in Greenwich, England at 11:59 PM on a Sunday evening. It may be 11:59 PM where you are, but you know that it is not 11:59 PM throughout the entire world. 45 degrees to the west, in Greenland, it is three hours earlier on the same day, or 8:59 PM on Sunday. In three hours, it will be 11:59 PM in Greenland. At the same time, in Brooklyn, New York, 30 degrees west of Greenland, it is 6:59 PM, again on Sunday. That means that in five hours, it will be 11:59 PM on Sunday. At that moment, as you know, in Los Angeles, it is 3:59 PM and in Honolulu, it is 1:59 PM, on Sunday. It will be 11:59 PM on Sunday in eight and ten hours, respectively. You notice that as you move out west, it is earlier in the day. Logically, then, if you think about Guam, which is 60 degrees west of Honolulu, it will be 9:59 AM on Sunday; 11:59 PM being fourteen hours away. Now if we travel west, say 135 degrees, all the way to Paris, we should expect it to be 12:59 AM on Sunday, with 11:59 PM twenty-three hours away. Another 15 degrees to the west would bring us back to Greenwich with 11:59 PM on Sunday twenty-four hours away. Of course, it cannot be both Sunday at 11:59 PM and twenty-four hours away from Sunday at the very same moment. Logic, therefore, demands that there be a point on the earth where the day changes from Sunday to Monday. The only question is where is that line?

At an international congress convened in 1884, a system was established in which the world is divided into time zones, each covering 15° of longitude. The meridian passing through the observatory at Greenwich, England was set as the prime meridian, marking 0° of longitude, from which all time is calculated. For each 15° east of Greenwich, the time is advanced one hour, and for each 15° west of Greenwich the time is set back one hour. The meridian 180° from this prime meridian, exactly halfway around the world from Greenwich, was designated as the International Date Line; arbitrarily demarcating the point at which the calendar day changes. The Date Line extends from the North Pole through the Pacific Ocean to the South Pole. It corresponds along most of its length to the 180th meridian of longitude, but deviates at certain points. The existence of a date line is a logical fact; it cannot be debated. What can be debated, however, is the placement of the line. Does *halachah* recognize the arbitrary line set in 1884, or does it operate based on a separate calculation? Clearly, the placement of the line affects every issue relating to the day of the week, from Shabbat to Yom Kippur, from the *shir shel yom* to the second day of Yom Tov. Discussion relating to this topic can be found in works as early as Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi's *Kuzari* (Book 11, 20) and in the *Ba'al HaMaor* to *Rosh HaShanah* (5a in Rif, s.v. ki).

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reward in store in *Olam HaBa*, as it is said, “If you restrain your foot because of Shabbat, [and refrain] from performing your affairs on My holy day, and you call Shabbat a delight, the holy of the Lord honored, and you honor it by not following your own ways, by not pursuing your

Contemporary *halachic* authorities differ as to the designation of the prime meridian and the corresponding date line. One view, set forth by Rabbi Menachem M. Kasher, advocates acceptance of the International Date Line adopted by the world community of nations in terms of determining the day of Shabbat in various regions of the world. Rabbi Kasher contended that designation of a specific date line is not decreed by the Torah, but is rather the prerogative of rabbinical authority. Acceptance of the prevailing International Date Line, he believed, would facilitate and assure the uniform observance of Shabbat by Jews residing in and visiting other regions of the world. Rav Yonason Shteif (cited in the monograph *The Date Line in Halacha*, compiled by Zalman Tropper) argues that the day of the week in *halachah* follows the tradition of the place. The day of the week has always been known to the people of Japan, Hawaii, etc., and that is therefore the day which the *halachah* recognizes.

Another view, set forth by Rabbi Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky, maintains that according to Torah law, the global center from which time is reckoned is Jerusalem, and consequently the date line is 180° from Jerusalem. In his view, Hawaii, which is to the east of the accepted Date Line and thus among the last places to start the day in international law, is to the west of the *halachic* date line and would therefore be one of the first places to start the day in *halachah*. This means, however, that Shabbat in Hawaii occurs on what people consider Thursday night and Friday.

A third view, advanced by the *Chazon Ish*, likewise affirms Jerusalem as the focal center. In his opinion, however, the calendar day extends 18 hours (270°) west and 6 hours (90°) east of Jerusalem; consequently the date line is to be located in China. Subject to contention considering the *Chazon Ish's* opinion is the status of places such as Japan and New Zealand which are farther than 90° from Jerusalem. That would make Japan among the last places to start the *halachic* day, not one of the first; Shabbat in Japan would thus be on their Saturday night and Sunday.

While the fundamental issue in the controversy remains unresolved and opinions differ regarding practical conduct, many authorities advise the following procedure for one confronted with the question of observing Shabbat at the proper time when traveling to distant parts of the world. In general, you must keep Shabbat, with respect to all laws and restrictions as well as the prayers and observance of *mitzvot*, in accordance with the calculation followed at your place of arrival and as kept by the established Jewish community in that place. Some maintain that the first week after crossing the date line you should, for the sake of stringency, also keep Shabbat according to the calculation of your place of departure.

If accepting this stringency, you should refrain from doing any *melachah* on this “extra” day, irrespective of whether it is a Biblical or rabbinic prohibition, but you

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own affairs and speaking [improper] words; then, you shall delight with the Lord, and I will cause you to ride atop the high places of the land, and I will feed you the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (*Yeshayahu* 58:13,14).

should consider it a weekday in other respects and conduct yourself accordingly in terms of prayer, *tefillin* and other *mitzvot*. In view of the complexity of this question and the practical problems involved, it is advisable to seek authoritative *halachic* guidance in each particular case. In any event, though, you should not schedule a flight under circumstances where it will still be Shabbat at the time of your arrival, even if it is after Shabbat at the time of departure (as possible in the case of a Saturday night flight from Australia to California). For general *halachot* relating to travel on Shabbat, see Chapter 4 and relevant notes.