

4. Travel by Boat on Shabbat*

דִּינֵי הַמַּפְלִיג בַּסְּפִינָה

1. It is forbidden to set out on an ocean voyage in a ship less than three days before Shabbat, that is, from Wednesday on.¹ But if you are traveling for the sake of a *mitzvah*, you are permitted to embark even on *Erev Shabbat*.²

* The laws of travel on Shabbat are bound with the laws of *Techum Shabbat*, the Shabbat boundaries. For a comprehensive discussion of those *halachot*, see Part IV, Chapter 11.

1. **Embarking on an Ocean Voyage Before Shabbat** You should not embark on a long journey by sea less than three days before Shabbat because travel by boat in turbulent waters might cause great discomfort during the first three days of the voyage, thereby preventing you from observing the *mitzvah* of *Oneg Shabbat*. In the view of some *poskim*, the three restricted days include Shabbat, beginning with Thursday; according to this view, it would be permissible to set out on a voyage on Wednesday. If you are traveling for a *mitzvah*, the restriction does not apply, in keeping with the principle being engaged in the fulfillment of one *mitzvah* exempts you from another *mitzvah*; the *mitzvah* of *Oneg Shabbat* would thus not apply to such a person. Some take a lenient view and consider travel for business or to visit friends—anything other than just for pleasure—as also being for the sake of a *mitzvah*.
2. **Travel on *Erev Shabbat*** Anyone who travels on Friday, whatever the mode of transportation, should make sure to be able to reach his or her destination early in the day, with sufficient time to prepare for Shabbat. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 249:1) states that on *Erev Shabbat* one should not travel more than three *parsa'ot* (a *parasang*, or Persian mile, is approximately four miles). Since travel today is generally not by foot, but by some means of transportation, this limit does not apply. Nonetheless,

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2. You are permitted to set out on a journey by boat on a river even on *Erev Shabbat*, and continue your journey on Shabbat, provided you are not required to do any work on Shabbat.³ You are permitted to travel on the vessel even if it is pulled by animals.⁴

3. In a case where you are permitted to set out on a voyage on Friday, if you go on board the ship *Erev Shabbat* and stay there until nightfall, even if you then return home and spend the night at home, you are permitted to board the ship again on Shabbat, provided it is not making the journey for Jews only. However, since you were at home on Shabbat, you acquired your Shabbat resting place at home. Therefore, if the ship goes beyond the *techum*, that is, farther than 2000 *amot* (approximately 3/4 of a mile), and it reaches land on Shabbat, you are confined to within four *amot*, beyond which you are not permitted to go.⁵

when contemplating travel on *Erev Shabbat*, you must consider the likelihood of a delay en route, which could result in the violation of Shabbat. If, having set out on a permissible journey before Shabbat, you find yourself in a dangerous situation, where your personal safety is imperiled, necessitating that you continue to travel on Shabbat, you are permitted to do so.

3. **Travel by Boat on Shabbat** You are permitted to travel by boat on Shabbat, provided that the boat is operated by non-Jews. You must, however, board the boat before Shabbat and establish your Shabbat “place” (*vis a vis* the laws of *Techum Shabbat*, see Part IV, chapter 11) there, so that the boat becomes like your home; you then have freedom of movement throughout the boat on Shabbat (see note 5). If the boat should dock on Shabbat, you may disembark, but you are restricted by all other Shabbat laws. You may not remove your belongings if they are *muktzeh*, or carry them where carrying is not permitted, and you are forbidden to sign documents and perform similar prohibited activities. If you know, in advance, that the boat is due to dock on Shabbat, you would be best advised to alter your schedule accordingly, in view of the difficulties you are bound to encounter, or at least arrange to remain on board until the conclusion of Shabbat.
4. **Travel on a Barge Towed by Animals** A barge that is pulled by animals walking alongside on the river bank may be boarded on *Erev Shabbat* for travel on Shabbat, since the animals are at a distance from the barge and there is no likelihood of a violation of Shabbat.
5. **Travel on a Boat That Leaves on Shabbat** Someone who is to travel on a ship that will set sail on Shabbat must establish his Shabbat “place” on board, so that he will have freedom of movement throughout the ship during the course of the journey on Shabbat. You can do this by boarding the ship before Shabbat and remaining aboard until it sails on Shabbat. In this case, if it reaches land on Shabbat, you will be permitted to walk a distance of 2000 *amot* in any direction upon disembarking, and if it docks in port, you

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4. You are permitted to travel by boat on Shabbat⁶ in order to pray with a *minyan* or for the sake of another *mitzvah*.⁷ Nevertheless, you should board the ship on Friday while it is still daytime, and remain there until after nightfall. You may then return home and come back on board the ship again on Shabbat. This is permitted if the ship is making the trip not for Jews only, but for others as well.⁸

can walk throughout the city, but, as already stated (note 3), you are bound by all other Shabbat laws. If you cannot remain on the ship until it leaves on Shabbat day, you should board on *Erev Shabbat* and stay on board until nightfall. If possible, it is advisable that you also light Shabbat candles, recite the Shabbat prayers and *Kiddush*, and eat some food while on board. Having acquired the Shabbat “place” on the ship in this way, you may then leave and spend the night at home or in a hotel within the city limits, and return to the ship the next day, on Shabbat, before it departs. This latter procedure, however, only makes it permissible for you to board the ship again on Shabbat, but should it reach land or another port on Shabbat, you would be obligated, in this case, to remain on board the ship until the conclusion of Shabbat. However, you still have freedom of movement throughout the ship since you acquired your place there.

6. **Travel on Shabbat by Car, Bus, Train or Airplane** Travel by boat is permitted on Shabbat under the conditions indicated. Other means of travel, however, such as by car, bus, train, or airplane, are forbidden on Shabbat. The difference is not fundamental to the act of traveling. Rather, there are a host of technical differences which render travel by sea the only permissible method. First, the laws of *techum* are not applicable at sea. But they are applicable, of course, on land; the *techum*, therefore, precludes travel by car or bus. While the laws of *techum* do not apply to air flight, there is no way to board an airplane without violating a variety of other prohibitions, not to mention the disruption to the spirit of restfulness and holiness of Shabbat which it would entail. Travel on an airplane is thus not permissible on Shabbat, whether you board the airplane on Shabbat or *Erev Shabbat*, even if you intend on landing to remain on the airplane or in the airport until after Shabbat. If you should board an airplane before Shabbat and it is delayed in flight and lands on Shabbat, you are subject to the restriction of the *techum* limit of 2000 *amot* as in travel by boat. You are not permitted to use any of the above modes of transportation, whether public or private, on Shabbat or on Yom Tov, both in the city and outside the city, even if it is operated by non-Jews and most of the riders are non-Jews.
7. **Travel to Eretz Yisrael** Travel to settle in *Eretz Yisrael*, and according to some *poskim*, even to only visit there, is considered a *mitzvah* in this regard, for the very act of walking four *amot* in the Holy Land is a *mitzvah* with incalculable reward in *Olam HaBa* (see *Magen Avraham*, 248:15).
8. **Travel on a Boat with Jewish Passengers** If the ship follows a regular schedule and it makes the trip regardless of the number of passengers, you are permitted to travel on Shabbat even if the majority of the passengers are Jews.