

Introduction

The mitzvot of Shabbat

Shabbat appears in fifteen places in the Torah (pp. 3–6), which attests to its great significance. In addition, it is possible to learn about the various mitzvot of Shabbat from the different places Shabbat is mentioned.

The prohibition of performing labor: The central prohibition is the prohibition to perform labor, which applies to oneself and to those for whom they are responsible: “You shall not perform any labor, you, and your son, and your daughter, your slave, and your maidservant, and your animal” (*Shemot* 20:9). Beyond the general prohibition to perform labor, several specific examples of prohibited actions are mentioned in the Torah, e.g., the prohibition to kindle a fire, the prohibitions of plowing and reaping, and, according to the **Rambam**, the prohibition of boundaries (i.e., traveling twelve *mil* beyond a boundary). The Torah also commands in general that it is incumbent upon us to rest from labor on Shabbat: “And on the seventh day you shall rest” (*Shemot* 23:12). The Sages taught that in this context, thirty-nine primary categories of labor are prohibited (p. 32).

Having one’s children rest: The prohibition of labor applies also to minor children, as the verse states: “You, and your son, and your daughter” (*Shemot* 20:9). It is prohibited to allow even children who have not reached the age of training in mitzvot to perform labor for our benefit. If they have not reached the age of training in mitzvot and they perform labor for their own benefit, there is no obligation to prevent them from doing so (pp. 6–8).

Having one’s slaves rest: It is prohibited for one’s slaves, even those who are not Jewish, to perform labor on Shabbat, as the verses state: “So that your slave and your maidservant may rest like you” (*Devarim* 5:13), and “And the son of your maidservant and the stranger will be invigorated” (*Shemot* 23:12) (pp. 8–9).

Having one's animals rest, driving a laden animal: Rest also includes one's animal, as the verse states: "You . . . and your animal" (*Shemot* 20:9). It is also prohibited for one's animal to perform labor on Shabbat, unless the animal is acting for its own pleasure. It is also prohibited for a person to perform labor with an animal on Shabbat, e.g., to lead it with a burden in the public domain, even if the animal is not theirs (p. 9).

Beyond the commandments requiring us to refrain from the performance of labor on Shabbat, there are also commandments requiring us to perform certain actions on Shabbat.

Remembering the Shabbat day: The Torah states: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (*Shemot* 20:8). The mitzva is to perform actions that will remind us of the virtue of Shabbat and its sanctity. This commandment is the source of the obligation to recite *kiddush* on Shabbat eve, and, according to some opinions, to recite *havdala* at the conclusion of Shabbat (pp. 12–13).

Deference and delight: Two additional commandments are derived from the words of Isaiah, "And you call the Sabbath a **delight** and the Lord's sacred, **honored**" (58:13): taking delight in Shabbat, e.g., eating tasty food on Shabbat, and deference to Shabbat, e.g., tidying the house in deference to Shabbat (p. 13).

Observing Shabbat: The Torah emphasizes several times that one must **observe Shabbat**: "However, you shall observe My Sabbaths, as it is a sign between Me and you" (*Shemot* 31:13). In general, the Torah does not mention an obligation of observance with regard to specific commandments; rather, it does so with regard to the totality of the commandments. **The emphasis on observance of Shabbat indicates the unique significance of Shabbat, and the idea that it constitutes a covenant between God and the Jewish people** (pp. 14–16).

Which labors are prohibited on Shabbat?

Shabbat and the Tabernacle

In several places in the Torah, Shabbat is juxtaposed to the construction of the Tabernacle. The Torah even cautions that when building the Tabernacle one must make certain to observe Shabbat. The Sages derived that the specific labors that were performed in the construction of the Tabernacle are the very labors that are prohibited on Shabbat.

There are many parallels between the Tabernacle and the creation of the world. Just as the world was created in six days and God rested on the seventh day, so it was in the construction in the Tabernacle, which is a human parallel to the creation of the world. With the construction of the Tabernacle the glory of the Lord was introduced into the world, and sanctity became part of reality. All the labors that were performed in the Tabernacle are considered creative, a duplication of God's creation. Just as God rested on the seventh day from creation of the world, so too the Jewish people rested on the seventh day from the creative activity of the Tabernacle; and in turn, we rest on the seventh day from performing the creative actions that were performed in the Tabernacle.

From here it is derived that the Torah prohibits only planned, constructive labor, of the type performed in the Tabernacle. This is labor with **significance** that is performed in a **calculated manner, commensurate with the person's plan**. If the person **did not intend** to perform the labor, it is permitted by Torah law (although at times it is prohibited by rabbinic law). Likewise, one who performs a **destructive** act is exempt (although doing so is prohibited by rabbinic law), since they did not perform a significant act; rather the action was destructive (pp. 32–33).

The labors and their division into categories

There are several different manners in which to divide the prohibited labors into categories. The conventional manner of division is on the basis of a person's needs (pp. 43–44):

39 Shabbat Labors		
1	Eleven labors connected to preparation of bread	Sowing, Plowing, Reaping, Gathering, Threshing, Winnowing, Selecting, Grinding, Sifting, Kneading, and Baking
2	Thirteen labors connected to preparation of clothing	Shearing, Whitening, Combing, Dyeing, Spinning, Stretching, Constructing two meshes, Weaving two threads, Severing two threads, Tying, Untying, Sewing two stitches, and Tearing in order to sew two stitches
3	Nine labors connected to writing	Trapping, Slaughtering, Flaying, Salting, Tanning, Smoothing, Cutting, Writing two letters, and Erasing in order to write two letters
4	Six labors connected to constructing a house	Building, Dismantling, Extinguishing, Kindling, Striking with a hammer, and Carrying Out from domain to domain

Primary category and subcategory

The mishna enumerates thirty-nine “**primary categories of labor.**” Based on the label of “primary,” one can conclude that the labors appearing on this list are fundamental labors from which secondary, similar labors, which are also prohibited, branch out. These labors are characterized as “subcategories.” For example: Sowing is a primary category, and watering a plant is somewhat similar to sowing, as it too facilitates growth. Watering is not a component of the primary category of Sowing; rather, it is a subcategory of Sowing. It is an offspring of a parent, in a sense, and it too is prohibited by Torah law.

In *Bava Kamma* (2a), the Gemara explains that there is virtually no practical difference between a primary category and a subcategory. An action that was a significant labor in the Tabernacle is considered a “primary category of labor,” while an action that was not a significant labor in the Tabernacle, or that was not performed in the Tabernacle at all, is considered a “subcategory.” Both actions are prohibited by Torah law and they carry the same punishment (pp. 45–49).

The *halakhot* of Shabbat are constructed in the form of principles

and details. The Torah prohibited thirty-nine fundamental labors, and after understanding the definition of each labor, it is possible to conclude which additional actions are considered subcategories of that labor and thus prohibited by Torah law.

This is also the proper method for studying *halakha* in general. The Torah and the halakhic sources cannot address in detail every incident that could transpire. Similarly, it is unrealistic to expect an individual to remember the *halakha* in each specific case; one must instead learn the principles of the *halakhot* in various areas. When encountering a specific case, one can apply those principles and determine the *halakha* in that specific case (pp. 49–50).

How did the Sages arrive at thirty-nine primary categories of labor?

The tally of thirty-nine primary categories of labor was transmitted as a tradition, a *halakha* transmitted to Moses from Sinai, and the Sages found allusions to this tally in the verses. For example, the words “labor [*melakha*]” and “labor of [*melekheth*]” appear thirty-nine times all together in the Torah. In-depth analysis shows that the number thirty-nine is a fundamental number for the entire Tabernacle project, and this reinforces our tradition with regard to thirty-nine primary categories of labor. For example, at the beginning of *Parashat VaYak’hel* (*Shemot* 35:10–19), right after Moses mentions the prohibition of labor on Shabbat, he commands the Israelites to prepare the different materials needed for the Tabernacle. There are **thirty-nine items that the Israelites were commanded to prepare that are listed in those verses** (pp. 51–54).

Rabbeinu Shlomo Yitzhaki (Rashi)

Rashi was born in Troyes, France, in 1040. He is considered the greatest of all commentators on the Torah and the Talmud. His commentaries are an indispensable point of departure for any student of the Bible and the Talmud, and they form the basis for all commentaries that followed. He is called by later commentaries *Parshandata* (the *parshan*, commentator, of religion [*dat*] and of the Torah). When Rashi's commentary on the Torah was first published, it was printed in a unique script that has since been known as "Rashi script" in order to differentiate between the text of the Torah itself and the commentary. However there is no connection between Rashi himself and this "Rashi script."

Rashi writes in a brief, concise style; consequently, every word is significant. His other works include responsa, *Sefer HaPardes*, and *Sefer HaOra*.

Rashi's commentaries on the Bible and the Talmud are remarkable. On the one hand, his commentary is essential for every student of these works. All students of the Talmud know that Rashi's commentary provides them with the basis for understanding the Gemara. And yet the commentary of Rashi is also relevant for the greatest scholars. The most brilliant minds have discovered profound principles and wonderful insights in Rashi's comments. Rashi's commentary on the Torah is not merely a scholarly work; it is a book of faith accompanying every observant child in their earliest years.

Apart from his role as a commentator, Rashi was also an important halakhic authority, and he wrote many responsa. His commentary and responsa also reveal his astonishing humanity and his noble personal qualities.

Rashi had three (or four) daughters. His sons-in-law and grandchildren were major Tosafists, including the **Rashbam**, **Rabbeinu Tam**, and the **Rivam**.

Toward the end of his life Rashi witnessed the First Crusade and even composed liturgical songs about this tragic event. He died in 1105.

Rav Yitzhak Meltzan

[*Shevitat HaShabbat*]

Rav Meltzan, born in Lithuania in 1854, was a student of **Rav Yisrael Salanter**, the founder of the *mussar* movement. He was an extremely erudite scholar whose breadth of knowledge was so vast that Rav Yisrael Salanter once said about him that when he is present there is no need for printed editions of the Talmud. For a brief period he studied in the yeshiva of Radin, which was the yeshiva of the **Hafetz Hayim**, but he left in order to immigrate to the Land of Israel. When he arrived he learned at the yeshiva *Torat Hayim*, together with **Rav Mordekhai David Levin**, who would later become *rosh yeshiva* of *Etz Hayim* and author of *Darkhei David*.

Rav Meltzan considered it a matter of great importance to strengthen the level of mitzva observance among Jews. He wrote books and numerous articles criticizing those who had distanced themselves from fulfilling the commandments and attempting to influence people to re-adopt Torah observance. Among other books, he wrote *Azharat Shabbat*, which explains at length the unique importance of Shabbat and the severity of its profanation. Later he composed a halakhic work called *Shevitat HaShabbat*, which clarifies at length the prohibited labors involved in the preparation of bread, from their general principles to the practical *halakha*, including novel issues that have arisen more recently. In his introduction to the book Rav Meltzan bemoans the desecration of Shabbat caused by a lack of knowledge of the *halakha*, as well as the paucity of books that deal with the laws of Shabbat in an organized, clear manner.

Rav Meltzan also composed a commentary on the prayer book called *Siaḥ Yitzhak*, which contains explanations of the basic meaning of the words together with comments on ethics and belief. He published this commentary in the prayer book *Ishei Yisrael*, which also includes the commentary of the **Vilna Gaon** on the prayers.

Rav Meltzan died in 1913.