

21. Tying a Knot

הקושר

1. The objective of this *av melachah* is to join ropes, cords, threads, etc., by tying a lasting knot.¹ Activities prohibited within this *melachah* include tying a craftsman's knot; tying a tightly-drawn double knot; tying a single

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1. **Tying a Knot on Shabbat** The prohibited *melachah* entails tying a permanent knot (קשר של קיימא). According to Rif, Rambam and the *Shulchan Aruch*, the *melachah* is violated when the knot is 1) generally left tied, without an intended time for undoing the knot, and 2) it is the kind of knot that is made by a craftsman, such as a sailor, a dockworker, or a shoemaker, etc. If it is a knot that is meant to remain tied, but it is not one that a craftsman would make, or vice versa, the *melachah* has not been violated, but it is nevertheless rabbinically prohibited. If it is neither, you are allowed to tie it. In the view of Rashi, Rosh, and other authorities the nature of the knot is of no consequence. If it is meant to be a permanent knot, namely, that it is usually left to remain tied, you violate the *melachah* even if it is not a craftsmen's knot. If it is a knot that is usually left tied for only a limited period of time, the *melachah* is not violated but it is nevertheless rabbinically prohibited. If it is one that is customarily untied on the same day, these authorities permit tying such a knot on Shabbat. In practice you are permitted to make a knot so long as it is not firmly tied, if it is one that is usually untied within a period of twenty-four hours—and if in that particular instance you actually intend to do so. Therefore, a woman may tie her *tichl* with a loose double knot if she is in the habit of untying it when she takes it off. In cases of urgent need, where there is no other way but to tie a knot, or you need to tie one to prevent or to alleviate pain or discomfort, or to perform a *mitzvah*, it is permissible to tie a knot that is to be untied within seven days.

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knot at the end or in the middle of a string or thread; tying two adjacent cords with a single knot; and tying other knots that are meant to remain permanently tied.

2. Also included within this *melachah* (*toladot*) is twining strands of rope so that they remain joined and cannot be parted without untwining them.

3. *Chazal* prohibited making a knot which is often made permanently even though the intention in this instance was to untie it. You are permitted, however, to tie a bow, that is, a knot formed by doubling a lace or a string into two or more loops,² as you generally mean to untie it that same day and it is easily untied.³

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2. **Tying and Untying Shoelaces** You are allowed to tie and untie shoelaces on Shabbat, since you untie them when you remove them that same day, and you tie them in a bow over a single tie which is not considered a permanent knot. If the shoelace is knotted and you are unable to untie it, you may tear or sever it in order to remove the shoe. You are allowed to reinsert a shoelace that has slipped out of the eyelet of the shoe, if you can do it without undue difficulty.
 3. **Tying a Necktie** A man is permitted to tie a necktie, if he regularly unties it when he removes it.

22. Untying a Knot

הַמְתִּיר עַל מִנַּת לְקַשּׁוֹר

1. The objective of this *av melachah* is to separate ropes, cords, threads, etc., that have been tied together with a lasting knot.

2. The *avot* and *toladot* that this *melachah* comprises correspond to the previous *melachah*. Whatever knot you may not tie, you may also not untie. Likewise, whatever knot you are permitted to tie, you are permitted to untie.

3. You are permitted to untie the string or cord that is bound around food or containers of food, beverages, medicine, etc., if the food or contents are required for use on Shabbat.¹

1. **Untying a Container of Food** You may untie a string used to tie fruit, such as figs and clusters of grapes, or food, such as stuffed fowl or roast meat. If it is not possible to untie or remove the string or cord from the fruit or food, or from a container of food and the like, you may tear or sever it even with a knife, provided it is not done in a way intended to preserve the string or cord for further use.



23. Sewing

התופר

1. The objective of this *av melachah* is to join two pieces of cloth or other materials by sewing them together with thread, etc., in a lasting manner. Activities prohibited within this *melachah* include sewing two stitches and knotting each end of the thread, or knotting both ends of the thread together; and sewing three or more stitches, even without knotting the threads, so that the stitches will not come apart.

2. Also included within this *melachah* (*toladot*) are pulling the thread of a seam¹ so as to draw the cloth or other materials together² and to hold them fast; and joining sheets of paper,³ strips of leather, or other

1. **Tightening Loose Tzitzit, the Thread of a Seam, or a Loose Button** A man may not tighten the top knot of his *tzitzit* if it became loose. Likewise, you may not pull the thread of a seam in order to tighten it, or of a loose button in order to secure it, even without making a knot to keep it fastened.
2. **Tightening a Band on Clothing** You may draw a band or a cord through the eyelets of a garment, as for example to tie up the opening of a dress or pajamas, or the inside of a winter coat, provided you often draw it when putting it on and loosen it when taking it off.
3. **Stapling Papers and Other Materials** You may not join sheets of paper or other materials by stapling them together.

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materials with an adhesive substance,⁴ or by some other means,⁵ in a lasting manner.⁶

3. *Chazal* prohibited filling a pillow or a quilt with down or feathers or similar material, for fear that a person may sew them shut afterwards. However, you are permitted to reinsert the down or the feathers that have fallen out.⁷

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4. **Use of Adhesives on Disposable Diapers or Band-Aids** Disposable diapers that are made to be secured with adhesive tape may be used on Shabbat. You may fasten the tape so that the diaper will hold after it is placed on the infant, and you may later unfasten it and tear it off if need be. Likewise, you may use Band-Aids on Shabbat, even though they are held together by adhesive, since you intend to use them only temporarily. There is a second issue involved with diapers and Band-Aids, as well. According to some *poskim*, you should remove the protective covering on the tape before Shabbat, to avoid the *Melachah* of *Korei'a*. Others disagree, reasoning that the bond between the protective covering and the tape was never intended to be permanent, and moreover, the two never meld together to form one unit. In truth, this discussion has become moot in regard to diapers, since diapers are now generally secured with a Velcro-like adhesive which poses no Shabbat concerns. However, the issue does apply to opening a Band-Aid which comes with the same protective strip. It is certainly praiseworthy to have a supply of open Band-Aids ready for Shabbat. However, if you do not have access to prepared Band-Aids, you may open them and remove the adhesive as needed.
 5. **Fastening Clothing with a Pin** You may use a straight pin, as well as a safety pin, to fasten a garment since you use the pin to fasten it only temporarily.
 6. **Opening and Closing a Zipper** You may open and close a zipper, even if the zipper can be completely disconnected and reconnected, as in a detachable raincoat lining.
 7. **Blowing Up a Balloon or an Inflatable Ball or Mattress** The reasoning cited in the text is that of the Rambam (*Hilchot Shabbat* 22:23). It would imply that as long as an item is not tied, it may be stuffed, with feathers or air, etc. Therefore, it would stand to reason that an inflatable ball or mattress, which is sealed with a peg, but not tied, could be filled on Shabbat. However, Rashi explains that the reason for not filling a new pillow is because doing so is tantamount to finishing its construction (מתקן מלאכה), and is not related to the *Melachah* of Tying a Knot. Therefore, inflating items with air may be prohibited regardless of whether it is tied at the end or not. Many *poskim* rule that you need only to refrain from inflating a ball or mattress for the first time. After that, it may be inflated, even with a pump.

24. Tearing

הַקּוֹרֵעַ עַל מִנַּת לְתַפּוֹר

1. The objective of this *av melachah* is to tear apart or separate materials that have been sewn or joined together in a lasting manner for the purpose of re-sewing or rejoining them. Activities prohibited within this *melachah* include undoing the stitches in a garment, and tearing apart cloth or other material in order to re-sew it.¹

2. Also included within this *melachah* (*toladot*) is separating paper, cloth, leather, wood and other materials that have been joined together in a lasting manner with an adhesive substance or by some other means.²

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1. **Incidental Tearing During Normal Use** You do not need to avoid ordinary use or handling of cloths or clothes on Shabbat for fear that you may tear them. For example, you can remove thorns that became entangled in a garment even if it may tear. (However, you should do so as privately as possible and attempt to avoid as much tearing as possible.) Also, you may crack nuts wrapped in a cloth even if the cloth may tear. You are allowed to act in these ways because you do not intend to tear the cloth or garment. Rather, the tear happens as a result of normal use.
 2. **Removing Staples from a Bag or Envelope** While you are not permitted to staple sheets of paper together or to staple an envelope to close it, you are permitted to remove the staples from an envelope or folder, and from a paper or plastic bag.

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3. *Chazal* further prohibited tearing,³ even when it is not in order to re-sew or repair the material.⁴ You are likewise not permitted to tear your garment in order to vent anger or to relieve your grief.

4. You are permitted to break open a sealed vessel or container of food, or to tear the cord binding it, if its contents are needed for Shabbat.⁵

3. **Tearing Bathroom Tissues** You are not permitted to tear absorbent paper towels or toilet paper from a roll, regardless of whether the paper is perforated. Even though the tearing is not for the purpose of reattaching, it is nonetheless tearing to construct something useable and therefore prohibited. Similarly, you may not tear off facial tissues that are attached. You should, therefore, prepare a supply of bathroom tissues before Shabbat. In a case of great need, and in keeping with the principles of *kavod haberiyot*, you may tear paper off the roll using some sort of *shinui*. The perforations on the paper are not a factor in the *halachah* as long as you do not intend to cut the paper to an exact measure.
4. **Opening the Mail** You are not permitted to tear open a sealed envelope on Shabbat. If it is urgent you may ask (in the permissible way) a non-Jew to open the envelope. Some *poskim* are of the opinion that you may destroy the envelope, rendering it completely useless, in order to get at its contents. It should be noted that in almost all cases, what comes in the mail is not relevant on Shabbat, and the preservation of the sanctity of Shabbat would warrant not opening the mail in any manner.
5. **Opening a Sealed Container** You are permitted to break open a sealed container of food, drink, medicine, etc., whose contents are needed for immediate consumption or use on Shabbat. Also, a plastic or paper bag that is stapled may be opened by removing the staples. You may likewise tear the wrapping or cut the cord binding or break the seal on a container, provided you avoid tearing any lettering or pictures. This leniency is due to two factors: 1) the container was not meant to be permanently sealed; this addresses the *Melachah* of Tearing, and 2) it is not considered a constructive act as there is no intention to reuse it after its contents are removed; this addresses the *Melachah* of Building. Therefore, you may not make an opening of a particular shape in the container in order to render it reusable as a utensil after its contents are removed. Some advise opening milk and juice containers that form a spout by cutting off from the top of the container or by making a hole in its side. Opinions differ on the permissibility of opening a bottle of wine or some other beverage by twisting the cap so that the bottom ring breaks off, leaving the upper part of the cap to form a reusable cover for the bottle. While some authorities forbid it, reasoning that the breaking of the ring is tantamount to creating the cap, others permit it, inasmuch as the cap served as a cover before the bottom ring was separated from it and only continues to serve as such afterward.

In view of the varied nature of sealed containers and the complexities in determining the permissibility of opening them on Shabbat, you should try to open cans, cartons, bottles and other containers before Shabbat.

24. *Tearing*

You may separate pages of a book that were inadvertently stuck together by paste or wax.⁶

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6. **Separating Pages of a Book** While you may separate pages of a book that were inadvertently glued together, you may not do so if they are stuck together on the words and in separating the pages the words will be torn. You are not allowed to cut or tear apart the uncut pages of a book on Shabbat.