

30. Scraping and Smoothing

הַמְמַחֵק

1. The objective of this *av melachah* is to remove coarse matter from the hide, and smooth its surface for further use. Activities prohibited within this *melachah* include removing hair or wool from the hide of a dead animal by plucking or scraping with a sharp instrument in order to smoothen it.

2. Also included within this *melachah* (*toladot*) are plucking feathers from the wing of a chicken; scouring a utensil with powder or an abrasive material or substance in order to polish and smoothen it;¹ sharpening a knife on a grindstone; smearing (מְמַרְחֵ) wax, pitch, grease, salves,²

1. **Washing Dishes with Liquid Soap** You may wash dishes with liquid soap and non abrasive substances, as general washing does not produce any real effect of polishing. In addition, liquid soap avoids the problem related to “smearing” (מְמַרְחֵ) the soap itself. The general consensus among *poskim* is that the bubbles created in the lather are not a concern related to the rabbinic prohibition of *nolad* (creating a new substance). On washing and drying dishes, see *Melachah* 11, note 13; *Melachah* 13, note 3.
2. **Applying a Salve and Bandaging a Wound** You are permitted to apply an antiseptic in liquid form or an antibacterial liquid directly to a wound on Shabbat, or to apply to a sore or a wound a medicated bandage or dressing that was prepared before Shabbat with a non-liquid cream or paste in order to protect it from irritation or infection. If you do not have a prepared bandage, you may apply a salve, Vaseline, or ointment by squeezing it from the tube onto the wound or on the bandage, or by taking it from the jar or container with a stick and dabbing it on the bandage, or

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creams,³ ointments,⁴ soaps,⁵ etc., on material or some other surface;⁶ and polishing shoes with shoe polish.⁷

3. *Chazal* also prohibited sealing a hole with wax, tar, etc.,⁸ for fear that you may transgress the *melachah* by smearing it on.

4. The prohibition does not apply to food which you can eat without smearing or smoothening. For that reason, you can smooth over a dish of cereal or spread butter, margarine, cheese, jam, etc., on bread.

on the wound and covering it with a bandage, without smearing or rubbing it on. You may apply Vaseline to an infant in a similar manner to relieve a diaper rash or to prevent it. If this method proves ineffective for some reason, and you fear infection, there are lenient opinions you can rely on to allow yourself to smear the ointment onto all parts of the wound. See Part IV, Chapter 7, paragraph 7 on bandaging a wound and applying medication on Shabbat.

3. **Use of Hair Cream, Oils, and Sun Lotions** You may not apply hair cream or a gel on your hair or scalp on Shabbat. Similarly, you should only use sun tan lotion that comes in a spray or in a runny form out of the bottle, not a cream. The *melachah* of “smearing” never applies to something in a liquid or runny form.
4. **Use of Deodorants and Perfumes** You may use deodorant spray or perfume on your body, but not on clothing, as “refreshing” clothing by spraying it with fragrance violates the rabbinic prohibition of *nolad*. You should use roll-on and spray deodorant, not a stick. According to some *poskim*, the deodorant should be unscented, so as not to perfume the hair. Some permit spraying a non-stiffening perfume on natural hair, but not onto a wig. You may spray deodorizer to freshen the air in a room.
5. **Washing with Soap** It is the accepted *minhag* to use only liquid soap on Shabbat, not a bar of soap.
6. **Brushing Teeth** It is customary to brush teeth with mouthwash or liquid toothpaste, not regular toothpaste. You should avoid brushing that will lead to bleeding of the gums. You may use a toothpick to clean particles of food from the teeth.
7. **Polishing and Cleaning Shoes** You are not permitted to polish or shine shoes on Shabbat, but you may remove dust by hand or with a cloth, without shining. You are also permitted to remove dirt or mud that is still moist by rubbing the shoes lightly on a piece of wood, a doormat, etc. You may not remove dry mud by hand or with an instrument. You may pour water on leather shoes to remove even dry mud or dirt. You are not permitted to have a non-Jew polish your shoes on Shabbat. If the non-Jew polished them, you may not use them until after Shabbat.
8. **Molding Clay or Food** You may not mold or shape clay, wax, plastic, etc., on Shabbat. Children should be advised to refrain from shaping models out of such substances on Shabbat. Similarly, you may not mold food into a distinct shape. You may, however, smooth out a platter of eggs, etc.

31. Cutting

הַמְחַחֵת

1. The objective of this *av melachah* is to cut off a portion of the hide to an exact measure. Activities prohibited within this *melachah* include cutting or tearing hides, leather, parchment or paper¹ to a particular size or shape, when it is cut or severed as it is usually done by hand or with a tool.

2. Also included within this *melachah* (*toladot*) are trimming feathers for use in pillows and bedding; shaping a quill; sharpening a pencil; and cutting and shaping a piece of wood for some useful purpose. The prohibition applies as well to cutting, tearing or breaking metal, plastic, cloth and other materials to a desired shape or pattern.

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1. **Tearing Paper Towels, Toilet Paper, and Tissues** You may not tear paper towels or toilet paper off a roll on Shabbat, whether you tear along the perforation or not. In case of necessity and due to the principle of *kavod haberiyot*, you may tear the toilet paper, but you should do so in an indirect manner, without paying attention to the size of the amount of paper you are tearing. You also may not tear apart tissues that are partially separated but still attached. You are permitted to use tissues and paper towels on Shabbat even if they are likely to tear; see *Melachah* 2.4, note 3.

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3. The prohibition does not apply to cutting up food that is edible and is being prepared for consumption.²

4. Cutting materials wastefully, or without regard to size, but only playfully or for no purpose is not a transgression of the *melachah* but is nevertheless rabbinically prohibited.

2. **Cutting Food** You may cut food into portions to serve at a meal. However, you should not use a specially designed implement to cut food, such as fruits and vegetables, into particular shapes and designs.

32. Writing

הכּוּתב

1. The objective of this *av melachah* is to write with a durable substance on durable material so that the writing will last.¹ Activities prohibited within this *melachah* include writing² letters or numbers, in any script³ and in any language, with pen, pencil, crayon or some other durable substance,⁴ on any durable material such as paper, parchment, wood, cloth, clay, metal, etc.

1. **Writing That Endures** As with all *melachot* on Shabbat, writing violates a Biblical prohibition only if it endures. The Mishnah states, “This is the general principle, whoever does work on Shabbat and his work endures is culpable” (*Shabbat* xII, 1). Authorities differ as to the intent of the stated principle of the Mishnah. Rambam maintains that you are culpable as long as the work lasts for that Shabbat. However, authorities such as Rashi, Ran, and others understand the Mishnah to mean that the Torah prohibition applies only if the work is enduring and complete in itself, and it is not necessary to add to it.
2. **Writing in an Unusual Manner** While the Torah prohibition applies only if you write in the usual manner, it is rabbinically forbidden to write on Shabbat with the back of your hand, with your foot or mouth, or in some other unusual manner. Similarly, a right-handed person writing with the left hand is *patur aval asur*. An ambidextrous person would violate the Torah prohibition writing with either hand.
3. **Writing in Shorthand** You are not permitted to write on Shabbat using any script. Therefore, stenographic writing or shorthand, where characters or symbols are substituted for letters, is a transgression of the *melachah*.
4. **Writing with Chalk** Writing with chalk on a blackboard on Shabbat is a transgression of the *melachah*, since the writing will remain for a considerable time until it is erased.

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2. Also included within this *melachah* (*toladot*) are making marks or signs; tracing lines, designs or figures; reproducing⁵ graphic material by means of imprinting,⁶ and typewriting.⁷ Making impressions⁸ on wax⁹ or other materials,¹⁰ or tearing paper, leather, or other materials to form letters is likewise in violation of this *melachah*.

3. *Chazal*¹¹ also prohibited writing and drawing with a substance or on materials that will not last.¹² For that reason, you may not write

5. **Taking a Photograph or Being Filmed or Photographed** You are not permitted to take a photograph with a camera, to develop the film, or to make prints from the film on Shabbat. You may not have a non-Jew take your photograph unless it is an emergency and cannot be delayed until after Shabbat. However, you do not need to avoid being photographed in cases when you are a passerby or otherwise disinterested in the non-Jew's picture. Similarly, you may walk in places that have surveillance cameras working on Shabbat.
6. **Use of a Rubber Stamp** You may not make an impression with a rubber stamp, or arrange the letters in the rubber stamp on Shabbat.
7. **Photocopying** Making a photocopy of written material is a transgression of the *Melachah* of Writing and is forbidden on Shabbat.
8. **Having Fingerprints Taken** You are not permitted to have your fingerprints taken on Shabbat. If you cannot avoid it, you may have it done with a non-Jew pressing down on the finger.
9. **Writing on an Erasable Writing Pad** You are not permitted to make impressions of letters or designs on a pad from which they can be erased by separating the upper sheet from the bottom part of the pad.
10. **Computer Screens, Digital Photography, Texting and E-Mail** Many of the issues raised in notes 3-9 assume that the *Melachah* of Writing applies to instances where there is some sort of physical impression being made to produce a picture (or sound). Nowadays, with the advent of digital technology, pictures and sounds are not formed by chemical imprints on film and phonographs, but by storage of masses of digital information. Some *poskim* contend that, technology notwithstanding, the result of an image on a screen is a violation of the *Melachah* of Writing; be they words on a computer screen, or an image on a camera. Others disagree, reasoning that no actual physical inscription is taking place. It could be further added that most people do not intend for any word or image to remain on the screen permanently. Of course, all forms of writing and photography are rabbinically prohibited, see paragraph 3.
11. **Instructing a Non-Jew to Write a Letter** You may not ask a non-Jew to write a letter or to send an e-mail on your behalf unless it is urgently necessary to do so, as for a sick person, or to perform a *mitzvah*, or if a great loss is involved.
12. **Making Letters or Designs on a Cake or in Fruit** You are not permitted to decorate a cake with icing in the form of letters or designs. You may squeeze icing or whipped cream

letters or draw designs on a misty or frosty windowpane, in sand, or on a dusty surface. However, you are permitted to make the shape of letters with your finger in the air or on the table, since there is no visible impression.¹³ You are not permitted to attach letters¹⁴ or numbers to material, as for example on a curtain or on clothing.

4. To avoid situations where people might be tempted to write, *Chazal* prohibited the transaction of business on Shabbat, as it usually involves writing and it might lead to a violation of the *melachah*. The prohibition of doing business on *Shabbat* is, moreover, alluded to by Yeshayahu (58:13,14):

“If you turn away your foot because of Shabbat, from pursuing your business on My holy day; and call Shabbat a delight, and the holy of the Lord honorable; and shall honor it, not doing your wonted ways, nor pursuing your business, nor speaking thereof. Then shall you delight yourself in the Lord, and I will make you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.”

Chazal understood this to mean that a person may not attend to business affairs, or even speak of them on Shabbat (*Shabbat* 113a, b). Inasmuch as there are scriptural allusions to the prohibition of transacting business on Shabbat, as in the above verses, and in the Book of *Nechemiah* where it is declared to be “a desecration of Shabbat” (10:32, 13:17), it is considered a “traditional law” (*divrei kabbalah*), which is as authoritative

onto a cake, so long as you do not form letters or special shapes or designs. You are also prohibited from cutting letters or designs into the peel of an orange or other fruit.

13. **Use of a Combination Lock** You are permitted to use a combination lock on Shabbat, which is operated by combining a series of numbers or letters, whereby the correct combination opens the lock.
14. **Combining Letters and Parts of a Puzzle** You are permitted to play games where letters are combined to form a word, such as Scrabble or Bananagrams, or to put together parts of a jig-saw puzzle to form a complete picture, provided the word or the picture is not set tightly in a frame or tightly interlocked. You need not, in any case, forbid young children from playing such games. In a game where letters or designs are imprinted on squares that are set in a frame, you may move and rearrange the squares.

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as Torah law. Its transgression is, therefore, more severe than in the case of other rabbinic prohibitions.¹⁵

5. Therefore, you are forbidden to hire,¹⁶ rent, buy,¹⁷ sell,¹⁸ borrow¹⁹ or lend on Shabbat, whether by verbal agreement or by handing

15. **Transacting Business Desecrates Shabbat** In discussing the *halachic* nature of the prohibition of transacting business on Shabbat, *Chatam Sofer* notes that it is a transgression of a rabbinic decree only if it is of an infrequent or occasional nature. But if you are regularly involved in conducting business on Shabbat, you are violating a Biblical command, even if you do not transgress a particular *melachah*. The Torah ordained Shabbat as a day of solemn rest, free of occupational and weekday activities that are not in accord with the spirit and observance of Shabbat as a holy day of rest.
16. **Compensation for Services on Shabbat** (שכר שבת) Someone who is hired for a job on Shabbat, which is in itself permissible, should not receive wages specifically for services rendered on Shabbat, but should be compensated by the week, the month, or the year. You may compensate those performing a *mitzvah*, such as a doctor or a nurse, a *chazan*, or a reader for reading the Torah, for services rendered on Shabbat. However, it is best in all instances, to have the salary or compensation cover some duties performed during the week as well. This concept is called *הבלעה*, literally translated as “swallowing.” The payment is thereby credited to the work performed on the weekday, and not for that performed on Shabbat. For example, a waiter whose primary job is to serve a Shabbat meal should also do some setting up before Shabbat, or some cleaning after. The payment can be officially credited to the set up and clean up, and not to the work on Shabbat. “Loopholes” such as this one ensure the balance between allowing for services which are permissible to people, while not ignoring the special character of Shabbat.
17. **Buying Property from a Non-Jew in Eretz Yisrael** A Jew is permitted to buy property from a non-Jew in *Eretz Yisrael*, and have the non-Jew sign and register the deed of sale on Shabbat. *Chazal* permitted this for the sake of Jewish settlement of *Eretz Yisrael*. This *halachah* has little practical function other than to impress upon us the importance of *Eretz Yisrael*; no government offices are open on Shabbat in *Eretz Yisrael*.
18. **Automated Business and E-Commerce** *Poskim* permit owners of vending machines to collect earnings from Shabbat based on the principle of *havla'ah*, as explained in note 16 above. Since the income from the machine entails more than payment for the item, such as maintenance costs, etc., it can be considered encompassing more than simply *sechar Shabbat*. It would seem that similar logic could apply to e-commerce as well. In addition, there may be other reasons to be lenient with e-commerce. First, credit card companies and banks do not transfer funds on the weekends, so even when a purchase is made online on Shabbat, no business is actually being transacted until the opening of the business week. In addition, it might be suggested that e-commerce is not within the confines of the prohibition of *sechar Shabbat* since the seller isn't actually doing anything. Rather, it might be compared to the setting of nets in advance of Shabbat, which is permitted, even though game will certainly come into the nets on Shabbat.
19. **Borrowing on Shabbat** You may not borrow or lend for the long term on Shabbat, where the loan passes into the possession of the borrower and is repayable

over the article in token of the transaction. You are, likewise, not permitted to weigh and measure, whether with a scale, a measuring utensil, or by hand. You may not repay a loan²⁰ on Shabbat, or engage in other activities that usually involve writing.

6. In case of necessity, as when medicine or another item is needed for someone who is sick, you may obtain it from the storekeeper on Shabbat, but without marking it in an account. Likewise, you should avoid mention of price, and the use of terms relating to buying and selling in requesting the article.²¹

7. You may not give a gift²² on Shabbat, as it resembles buying and selling, since the article leaves the possession of the donor

after a considerable time, for fear that the lender may write down the details of the loan. You may, however, borrow an item you will use and then return. When borrowing you should not say “lend me” (הלויני) which implies the wish to keep the article for a lengthy period, since we fear that there, too, the lender may note it down in order to remember it. You should rather say “give me” (השאילני).

20. **Repayment of a Loan** If you are obligated to repay a loan on a specified date which occurs on Shabbat, you may do so by means of a pledge, or have a non-Jew repay it for you. If a non-Jew comes to repay a debt on Shabbat, you may allow him to leave the money and to redeem his pledge or to exchange it, but you should not handle the money or make a reckoning of the loan. It is best that you not handle the pledge as well.
21. **Requesting a Non-Jew to Make a Purchase** You are forbidden to request that a non-Jew make a purchase for you on Shabbat. However, you may ask him to buy it for himself, with the understanding that if you need it you will buy it from him after Shabbat. You may also give a non-Jew money before Shabbat to buy something, promising to compensate him for his services. You should not, however, stipulate that he is to buy it on Shabbat, and if the non-Jew then makes the purchase on Shabbat, he will be doing it for his own benefit. If there is enough time for the non-Jew to make the purchase before Shabbat, compensation for his services is not a requirement, and the non-Jew can then make the purchase when he sees fit to do so. But in this instance, as well, you may not stipulate that he buy it on Shabbat.
22. **Giving a Gift** You may not give gifts on Shabbat. However, you are permitted to have a third party accept the gift on behalf of the recipient prior to Shabbat, even without the knowledge of the intended recipient (וכין לארם שלא בפניו). You are permitted to bring a bottle of wine or desert to a host on Shabbat (within an *eruv*) as this gift is considered relevant to Shabbat itself.

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and comes into possession of the recipient. However, you may do so if the gift is needed for that Shabbat or if it is for the sake of a *mitzvah*. You may not cast lots on Shabbat, as it may lead to writing.

8. You may not hold any judicial proceedings on Shabbat, neither civil, criminal, marriage, divorce, nor *chalitzah*, as they are customarily accompanied by writing. You are also not allowed to confirm an agreement by handing over an object from one to the other of the contracting parties, because it is like a business transaction, except in the case of a dangerously ill person who has made a verbal declaration of his will. In such a case, you are allowed to do so in order to put his mind at rest. You may not perform a *pidyon haben* on Shabbat, even with an article worth five *shekalim* in place of money, as it is similar to a business transaction.

9. You are not permitted to gamble or play games for profit, as it is like transacting business. You should likewise refrain from playing games that usually involve writing.²³

10. You may not read or examine commercial documents, such as bills of sale, invoices, promissory notes, contracts, business correspondence, etc. You may not attend to or discuss business

23. **Games That Involve Score Keeping and Word and Picture Building** You should not play games in which points are recorded and score is kept on Shabbat, since such games usually involve writing. Games such as chess, checkers, and dominoes are permissible. A game, such as Scrabble, where the letters are put together loosely is permissible, but not if the letters are wedged tightly in a frame. You are likewise prohibited from assembling a jig-saw puzzle if the pieces are wedged tightly together. It is best to refrain from playing games such as Monopoly that use play money. Young children may play with puzzles and play with paper money. As stated above, the *navi* describes the maximal fulfillment of the Shabbat experience as “delight in *Hashem*.” A Jew should always be mindful of that ideal whenever the issues of sports and games on Shabbat come up. Merely avoiding the violation of a *melachah* or prohibitions of *muktzeh* robs the Shabbat of its inner spirit and essence.

32. *Writing*

affairs.²⁴ You should likewise refrain, as far as possible, from thinking of business matters on Shabbat.

24. **Attending to Communal and Charitable Affairs** While you are not permitted to calculate or discuss business accounts on Shabbat, you may do so in connection with a *mitzvah*, such as contributions to charity, attending to communal needs, donations to the synagogue and philanthropic and educational institutions, purchasing *aliyot*, and other *mitzvot*.



33. Erasing

הַמּוֹחֵק עַל מִנַּת לְכַתּוֹב

1. The objective of this *av melachah* is to erase writing of a durable nature in order to prepare the surface for new writing. Activities prohibited within this *melachah* include erasing or obliterating writing that is durable by rubbing, smearing, blotting and scraping, whether by hand, use of an eraser or a tool, or by means of a chemical.

2. Also included within this *melachah* (*toladot*) is erasing or obliterating markings, signs, designs, figures, etc.

3. *Chazal* also prohibited any erasures, even if not for the purpose of preparing space for new writing. You are, likewise, prohibited from removing letters or numbers that have been attached to some material, such as to clothing or to a curtain.¹

4. You may not tear or cut through writing in order to open a sealed letter or envelope, a sealed food wrapper, or a sealed wine or

1. **Opening a Parochet with Lettering on It** If the *parochet* is made of two sections, you should take care to construct it so that any words inscribed on the *parochet* are not parted as it is opened. If it was constructed so that a word is divided as the *parochet* is opened, Rav Moshe Feinstein *zt"l* ruled that it is still permitted to open and close the *parochet* on Shabbat, since the letters are not joined together. However, he suggests that it is best to part the curtains somewhat before Shabbat; see above, *Melachah* 32, note 14.

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whiskey bottle. You are permitted to open and close a book that has letters or words stamped on the edges of the pages along its side.²

5. You should not cut a cake that is decorated with coloring in the form of letters or designs in a way that spoils that lettering or those designs.³ If the lettering and designs are made of the same ingredients as the cake, or of sugar, honey, jelly, chocolate, and similar non-durable foods, you may cut the cake without regard for the letters or designs. If the letters are made from icing, you should not cut or erase them. However, you may eat a cake or cookie that has writing on it without regard to the erasing caused by biting, and regardless of the nature of the writing.⁴

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2. **Opening a Book with Lettering on the Edges** Most authorities do not consider opening a book with lettering on the edge of the pages to be subject to the prohibition of writing or erasing, because it is made to be opened and closed and the letters remain intact.
 3. **Removing a Slice of a Cut Cake** If the cake was cut before Shabbat you may remove a piece in any case, even if the letters or designs are broken up in the process.
 4. **Cookies or Cakes with Letters or Designs** You are permitted to cut or break cakes or cookies baked in the shape of letters or designs, as well as cookies, crackers, biscuits, and chocolates that have a name or a trademark impressed on them. As indicated above, the general practice is to be lenient only if the letters are part of the cookie or cake, but not if they are added with icing. For those who are strict, it should be noted that since there are *poskim* who allow cutting cakes with lettering outright, you do not have to refuse a piece of cake if it has been cut for you.