

## 5. Weekday Activities Forbidden on Shabbat

### דִּינֵי עֲשִׂית חֲפָצֵיו בְּלֹא מְלָאכָה

1. Certain activities are forbidden on Shabbat even though they do not resemble a *melachah* nor do they lead to doing a *melachah*.<sup>1</sup> Why, then, are they forbidden? It is because Shabbat encompasses more than merely avoiding *melachah*. In order for Shabbat to achieve its purpose as a day of rest and spiritual bonding with *Hashem*, its rhythm and pace need to be different than the other six days of the week. This is the message the prophet Yeshayahu speaks of when he says, “If you turn away your foot because of the Sabbath, from attending to your affairs on My holy day... and shall honor it, not doing your wonted ways,<sup>2</sup> nor pursuing

1. **Activities of a Weekday Nature** Some *poskim* consider all activities that are rabbinically prohibited on Shabbat as weekday activities (עִוְבָדִין דְּחוּל). Others, however, distinguish between rabbinic prohibitions that relate to *melachot* which are termed שְׁבוּתִין and other rabbinic prohibitions, which are intended to preserve the unique spiritual, festive and tranquil character of Shabbat. It is in keeping with the latter objective that *Chazal* prohibited certain activities because they are of a weekday nature and as Rambam notes, if one would engage in such activities Shabbat would be degraded and turn into an ordinary weekday.
2. **Playing Ball and Other Games** *Poskim* take a lenient view and permit playing with a ball on Shabbat provided it is not outside an *eruv*, or where the ball may fall out of bounds outside of an *eruv*. Certain sports, however, such as soccer, golf, and football,

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your business, nor speaking thereof” (*Yeshayahu* 58:13). *Chazal* explained (Shabbat 113a) that “and shall honor it, not doing your wonted ways,” means that your walking on Shabbat should not be like your walking on weekdays.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is forbidden to run on Shabbat (with the exception of running to do a *mitzvah*).

2. *Chazal* have taken the words “nor pursuing your business” to mean that commercial business may not be attended to on Shabbat, even if it does not entail doing any *melachah*. For example,<sup>4</sup> you may not inspect your property to see what requires to be done the next day. It is also forbidden to walk about the city in search of a means of transportation to hire after Shabbat, if it is apparent that you are not simply walking but are going for that purpose. However, you are permitted to watch over your property and belongings, or those of your neighbor.

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are forbidden if they are played on grass, for fear that the ground may be either dug up or leveled. Ball games that are played on a board, a mat, or a table, such as table tennis, are permitted. Nevertheless, while some games as noted are not forbidden, it is improper to spend the whole Shabbat day engaged in sports, as this is not in the spirit of Shabbat as a day of rest and holiness. You may be lenient with children playing ball, but it important to nonetheless impart to children the special character of the day. Perhaps a change in the game rules may be in order even for young children. Shabbat requires marking the day with special clothing as well. That should be taken into account when children’s activities are being planned. You should also not attend sporting events even as a fan. Young boys and girls are permitted to play board games, although it is best that they occupy themselves with activities more in keeping with the spirit of Shabbat. In sum, the question of “What *melachah* does it violate?” is only one part of the Shabbat experience. A Jew should also ask, “Is what I am doing creating an enhanced atmosphere?”; see Part II, *Melachah* 1, note 5.

3. **Jogging and Exercise** You are permitted to go walking, but not running or jogging. Young children who enjoy jumping and running may do so on Shabbat, as this is their enjoyment. You are not permitted to do exercises on Shabbat that involve physical exertion and are intended to work up a sweat and tire yourself. Some permit a person to follow a daily routine of calisthenics intended to maintain physical fitness, but this is a minority opinion and not commonly practiced. You may do breathing exercises to correct impairment. You may use a small, hand exerciser to strengthen the hand and the fingers.
4. **Moving Furniture, Checking Schedules** Other forbidden activities of this nature might include moving furniture around the house, rearranging your library, checking on train, bus or airline schedules, etc.

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3. *Chazal* also limited certain activities at the end of Shabbat for fear that a person might appear to be rushing Shabbat away to get a head start on with his or her weekday activities. Doing such a thing is an obvious affront to the sanctity of Shabbat. One such prohibition is called “*machashich al hatechum* (מַחֲשִׁיךְ עַל הַתְּחוּם).” A word of background is in order. On Shabbat, you are not allowed to travel beyond the *techum Shabbat* (the Shabbat limit, תְּחוּם שַׁבָּת). This limit is a distance of two thousand *amot* past the edge of town. Even if you are not carrying anything, you may not travel in excess of the *techum Shabbat*. If a person had business outside the *techum*, he might be inclined to travel towards the *techum*, and wait there until nightfall in order to be able to set out on the trip the moment Shabbat is over.<sup>5</sup> Doing such a thing is called *machashich al hatechum*. By walking to the *techum* and starting out from there at the conclusion of Shabbat,<sup>6</sup> it is evident that you went there principally for that purpose.

*Chazal* only prohibited this, however, if you are waiting until nightfall in order to do something which you cannot do on Shabbat. However, you are permitted to go and wait at the *techum* border until nightfall in order to do something that is permitted on Shabbat.

The travel habits of modern man have taken this set of *halachot* out of common use (in that people with cars do not need to walk to the edge of town to get a head start). Nonetheless, the idea that we may not begin our weekday endeavors while it is still Shabbat is very much in force.<sup>7</sup>

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5. **Going to the Station or Airport** You may not go to the bus or train station or the airport on Shabbat, and wait until nightfall in order to board a bus, train or airplane at the close of Shabbat so as to begin your trip sooner.
  6. **Carrying a Bus Pass for Use After Shabbat** If you set out to walk a considerable distance on Shabbat, you may not take along a bus ticket or a transit pass for return transportation after Shabbat, even where it is permissible to carry, because it is *muktzeh* and one would, moreover, be preparing on Shabbat for the weekday.
  7. **Loading a Washing Machine and a Dishwasher, and Dressing Children in Pajamas** Whether preparing on Shabbat for a weekday activity is permitted depends on what is evident as to the purpose you have in mind. For example, you may not put dirty clothes into a washing machine to prepare them for washing after Shabbat. But if you are accustomed to store dirty clothes in the washing machine until they are washed it is permissible, provided there is no water in the machine. You are permitted to put dishes into the dishwasher, as it is common practice to do so after a meal and to store

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4. Yeshayahu's words "nor speaking thereof" are explained by *Chazal* to mean that your speech on Shabbat should not be the same as on weekdays.<sup>8</sup> For example, you may not say, "I will do this work tomorrow," or "I will buy this merchandise tomorrow." This is forbidden only if you talk about doing something which you may not do on Shabbat under any circumstances. But if there is a permissible way to do that on Shabbat, even though it is not feasible at the time, you are permitted to talk about it. For example, you may say, "I will go to that place tomorrow." However, you should not say, "I'll drive to that place tomorrow." Even if said in the proper way, you shouldn't talk too much about your travel plans on Shabbat. You may not make calculations verbally on Shabbat, neither of future transactions, nor of past transactions that you still need to know, as for example, if you calculate how much you spent for the workers' wages on a certain building and there are still wages due them, so that you need to know the full detailed account. However, you are permitted to make calculations for which you have no need, provided you do not do it excessively, as it is forbidden to engage in too much idle talk on Shabbat.<sup>9</sup>

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them there until it is time to wash them, and it is not evident that your intention is to prepare them for a weekday activity. (Therefore, the dishwasher door is not *muktzeh*. Of course, you must know how your machine operates to ensure that opening and closing the door does not result in starting the machine or some other electronic operation.) Similarly, you may dress children in their pajamas before Shabbat is over, even though they will not be going to bed until after *Havdallah*. This is not considered preparing on Shabbat for the weekday, as children are usually dressed for bed some time before bedtime for various reasons.

8. **Shabbat Greetings** When meeting or visiting friends on Shabbat, you should not greet them in the same manner as you would on an ordinary weekday. Rather, you should greet them with a Shabbat greeting, whether in Hebrew or in another language, such as *Shabbat Shalom* or *Guten Shabbos*, in fulfillment of the Torah's directive, "Remember the Shabbat day" (*Shemot* 20:8).
9. **Your Manner of Speech** You should attempt to elevate yourself through a refinement of speech on Shabbat. It is deemed praiseworthy not only to refrain from idle talk on Shabbat, but to speak only in the holy language—*lashon kodesh*—in keeping with the holiness of the day. You should try to not speak about bad news or grave matters on Shabbat.

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5. From Yeshayahu's words "Nor pursuing *your* business," Chazal have inferred that only discussing personal business affairs is forbidden,<sup>10</sup> but "the affairs of Heaven" are permitted.<sup>11</sup> Therefore it is permitted to be "*machashich al hatechum*" in order to perform a *mitzvah*.<sup>12</sup> You may also attend to matters of communal concern on Shabbat, such as going to meet with a government official or the ruling council to speak on behalf of the people, because the needs of the community are regarded as heavenly concerns. You may talk with a teacher about teaching your child. (This even extends to teaching your child a trade as this is also considered a *mitzvah*, because a livelihood is considered absolutely essential.) However, it is forbidden to hire the teacher on Shabbat, because hiring is an actual violation of a rabbinic ordinance (שְׂבוּת) and is not permitted even for the sake of a *mitzvah*. Only what is forbidden because of the admonition "nor pursuing your business, nor speaking thereof" is permitted for the sake of a *mitzvah*; violations of more concrete rules are not allowed.<sup>13</sup> You are also permitted to announce you found a lost article on Shabbat, for *hashavat aveidah* is a *mitzvah*.

6. Since it says "nor *speaking* thereof," Chazal have inferred that only speech is forbidden but thinking about weekday activities is not prohibited.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, it is a *mitzvah* to not think about them at

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10. **Pledging Money to the Synagogue or to Charity** You are allowed to pledge a sum of money as a donation to charity or to the synagogue on Shabbat. You are also permitted to record the pledge by placing a paper clip next to the name of the donor.
  11. **Arranging a *Shidduch* and Providing for a Bride** You may arrange for a *shidduch* on Shabbat. You may also be *machashich al hatechum* in order to attend to the needs of a bride. These, too, are *mitzvot* that come under the category of "heavenly concerns."
  12. **Attending to the Dead** You may be *machashich al hatechum* to attend to the needs of a dead person, such as to arrange for a coffin or shrouds, as this is a *mitzvah* which comes under the category of "heavenly concerns."
  13. **Buying a House from a Non-Jew in Israel** You are allowed to buy a house from a non-Jew in the Land of Israel on Shabbat. While you may not violate Shabbat by writing or making any actual payment, you can arrange for the purchase and provide assurance of payment. The non-Jew may sign the deed of sale and register it in the courts. That Chazal permitted this shows the importance of the *mitzvah* of Jewish settlement in *Eretz Yisrael*.
  14. **Reading or Listening to Business Reports** Those weekday affairs that are permissible to think about are the thoughts that normally come into mind, since it is not

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all because of *Oneg Shabbat*, the enjoyment of Shabbat. Those who really live the message of Shabbat consider it as though all of their work is done. This is what is meant when the Torah says, “Six days shall you labor and do *all* your work” (*Shemot* 20:9). It is not possible for a person to complete all his or her work in six days. However, the Torah invites us to be so engaged in enjoyment of Shabbat and so focused on *Hashem* that we view ourselves as complete and as though all our work were completed (*Mechilta* to *Shemot* 20:9). You should particularly refrain from thinking about something that will trouble you or cause anxiety.<sup>15</sup>

7. You are permitted to say to a worker, “Do you think that you will be able to meet me tonight?” even though he will understand from the question that you need to hire him that evening for work, because only an explicit statement is forbidden. But you should not say, “Be ready to meet me tonight,” as this is tantamount to telling him explicitly that you want to hire him.

8. Someone who works on Shabbat, such as a watchman on a shift, may not take any wages specifically for Shabbat. However, if hired by the week or by the month, he or she may take wages for the entire period, including Shabbat.<sup>16</sup>

9. You may not give someone a gift, unless it is something that is needed for Shabbat.<sup>17</sup> You are also forbidden to give someone an object as collateral, unless it is for the sake of a *mitzvah*, or it is needed

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expected that you should be able to banish your thoughts altogether. It is, however, not permitted to deliberately set your mind to weekday business affairs by reading the business section in the newspaper, or by listening to the business and stock market report on the radio.

15. **Visiting a Sick Person or a Mourner** You are permitted to visit the sick and to visit the house of a mourner on Shabbat, although this may cause you pain and anxiety. Since it is a *mitzvah* to visit the sick and to bring consolation to those in mourning, it is permitted. However, it is best to make a *shiva* visit during the weekday when the mourners are formally sitting *shiva*. You should not do so only for convenience, failing to take time during the week and deliberately postponing the visit for Shabbat.
16. **Hiring a *Chazan* for Shabbat and Yom Tov** See Part II, *Melachah* 32, note 16.
17. **Presenting a Gift to a Bar or Bat Mitzvah** See Part II, *Melachah* 32, note 22.

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for Shabbat. When giving it you should not say, “Here is the pledge,” but you should just give it to him.

10. All of the *halachot* above, as mentioned, serve to protect the day from becoming weekday-like in nature, and to create an atmosphere of holiness. As such, it is important to use that atmosphere for spiritual pursuits, and not trivial ones.<sup>18</sup> There is no greater avenue for spiritual pursuit than Torah study. Therefore, it is important to make Shabbat a day of Torah. For those who are advanced in their degree of piety, Shabbat is spent in pursuit of Torah to the exclusion of all else. Every Jew, however, no matter what degree of piety, should devote time to Torah study.

11. You may not take the measure of anything that needs to be measured,<sup>19</sup> unless it is for the sake of a *mitzvah*.<sup>20</sup>

12. Where you may otherwise suffer a loss, you may discuss your needs with either a Jew or with a non-Jew.

18. **Reading the Newspaper and General Literature** *Poskim* debate the propriety and permissibility of reading general literature on Shabbat. Some take the position that books on subjects such as science and history are allowed. In addition, some *poskim* allow students to read secular literature in preparation for upcoming tests. It should be noted that many people try to avoid studying for tests on Shabbat. Although they may not be prohibited technically, such endeavors do not add to the creation of a meaningful Shabbat. There are really two rules of thumb to consider when facing this issue, one concrete and one abstract. The concrete rule is that reading related to pertinent business issues is forbidden. Therefore, following your stocks or looking through bills is prohibited. The abstract rule is that the holiness of Shabbat is created through our actions. Therefore, what we choose to occupy ourselves with on Shabbat will affect the impact that Shabbat has on us. Of this issue, it may be said: “...as long as our intentions are for the sake of Heaven.”

19. **Filling a Measuring Cup with Food** Where the measurement is not of the nature of a business transaction and it does not have the appearance of a weekday activity, it is permitted. For example, you may request that a cup ordinarily used for certain measurements be filled with food or other products. You may also ask for a quantity of eggs or other products, provided that no price is stipulated.

20. **Measuring for a Mitzvah** Measurements that pertain to a *mitzvah* which are permitted on Shabbat include measuring a *mikveh* to determine whether it contains the required forty *se'ah* of water, and measuring a mixture of food to see if it contains a sufficient amount to neutralize a forbidden ingredient. Taking a temperature with a thermometer is also considered to be for the sake of a *mitzvah* and is permitted.