

INTRODUCTION TO SHABBAT

Goal of Creation

Shabbat was the goal of Creation. Just as God completed the world's creation on the sixth day and ceased His work on the seventh, so Jews are supposed to imitate God and not do any creative work on the seventh day. Everything we need for living through Shabbat must be prepared ahead so that we do not do any creative activities on Shabbat.

Our observance of Shabbat thus testifies that God created the world. In the Shabbat kiddush, we mention the Exodus from Egypt, too, to testify to the world that God is continuously involved in our lives.

By ceasing our normal efforts to dominate the physical world, we can appreciate the spiritual aspects of our existence.

On Shabbat, all observant (shomer Shabbat) Jews receive an extra “soul.”

Zachor and Shamor Remember (Zachor) the Sabbath day to make it holy—Exodus/Shmot 20:8

Observe (Shamor) the Sabbath day to make it holy—Deuteronomy/Devarim 5:12

Shabbat has two dimensions:

- Zachor “Remember,” encompassing positive (“to do”) commandments, and
- Shamor “Observe,” encompassing negative (“refrain from”) commandments.

NOTE Women, who are normally exempt from positive, time-dependent commandments, must do both positive and negative Shabbat commandments since, according to tradition, God said both words simultaneously. This is unlike Jewish festivals, when women are often exempt from positive, time-dependent commandments.

Zachor: Positive Shabbat Commandments

What Are Positive Shabbat Commandments

Positive Shabbat commandments include:

- Lighting candles,
- Making kiddush evening and morning,
- Making havdala,
- Honoring Shabbat (Kivod Shabbat), and
- Enjoying Shabbat (Oneg Shabbat), including eating three meals on Shabbat.

Honoring Shabbat: Special Food and Clothes

Honoring Shabbat includes eating tasty food and wearing nice clothes.

Shamor: Negative Shabbat Commandments

Shabbat Laws from the Torah (Shabbat D'Oraita)

What Are Melachot

On the Jewish day of rest, we refrain from 39 creative activities (melachot) that had been used to build the Tabernacle in the wilderness. These 39 melachot, prohibited by the Torah, are listed in the mishna of Shabbat and in later halacha books.

The word melacha is frequently mistranslated as “work,” but work has nothing to do with the Jewish concept of melacha. Some melachot are physically strenuous (plowing, grinding wheat, skinning an animal) and some are easy to do (drawing, baking). The defining point is whether the activity is one of the 39 creative, value-adding labors. Emptying your pockets before leaving an eruv (so you are not “carrying”) may seem confusing to someone who thinks that resting on Shabbat means refraining only from hard physical labor!

What Are Toldot

Toldot are variations of the 39 *melachot*. These types of *melacha* are also prohibited by the *Torah*.

Intention and Other Considerations

Most *Torah (d'oraita)* prohibitions of *melacha* on *Shabbat* are for cases in which you:

1) **Intend a permanent change.**

Often, actions that may be forbidden when they cause permanent change, will be permissible by *Torah* law if the result is only temporary. Or

2) **Intend or act for a specific purpose.**

Random or unintended actions are generally not prohibited by *Torah* law.

(However, actions that are not prohibited by the *Torah*, may be prohibited by *Chazal*.)

Whether you may benefit from a *melacha* done on *Shabbat* depends on intention:

- A Jew who intentionally does a *melacha* on *Shabbat* may never benefit from that *melacha*.

NOTE Any other Jew may benefit from that *melacha* as soon as *Shabbat* is over.

- A Jew who does *melacha* on *Shabbat* by mistake (*shogeg*) may benefit from that *melacha* immediately after *Shabbat* ends.

In order to violate a prohibited *melacha d'oraita*, the *melacha* must be done as follows. If any of these do not apply, then the *melacha* is forbidden *d'rabanat* but not *d'oraita*:

- ***K'darko***--The action must be done in a normal way.
- ***Tzorech tikun***—The action must be done for a constructive purpose.
- ***Tzricha l'gufa***--You must need the normal result of that action.
- ***Asiya b'yachid***—The action must be done by one individual (if commonly done by just one person).
- ***Mit'aseik***--You must realize that you are doing a *melacha*.

Shabbat Laws from *Chazal (Shabbat D'Rabanan)*

Chazal instituted additional restrictions, such as:

- Activities that might lead directly to violating a *Torah* prohibition.
- Use of items not designated for *Shabbat* use (*muktza*). For a good explanation of *muktza* from the TorahTots website, please click [here](#).
- Activities that might lead one to think that a prohibited activity is permissible (*mar'it ayin*--the appearance of the eye).
- Activities that are not appropriate for *Shabbat*, even though they are technically permissible according to the *Torah* (“*uvda d'chol*”).
- *Tircha*--Exerting a physical effort to accomplish a result that is not required for *Shabbat*.

Enjoying *Shabbat/Oneg Shabbat*

Chazal instituted laws to engender a positive *Shabbat* atmosphere and experience. Beyond the actual *halachot* of *shamor* and *zachor*, we have a concept of enjoying *Shabbat (oneg Shabbat)*—of enhancing our experience of *Shabbat* by doing whatever each person finds to be enjoyable and relaxing--as long as it is neither destructive nor violates the laws of *Shabbat*. The criteria are subjective. To fulfill the idea of honoring *Shabbat*, do things you would not do just for yourself if it were not *Shabbat*. Take essential life activities such as eating and sleeping and do them more and better and make them especially enjoyable.

Meals as *Oneg*

On *Shabbat*, we eat better foods and more types of food than we would normally do on weekdays.

The main idea behind meals for Shabbat is enjoyment (oneg; by contrast, the main idea for Jewish festivals is joy--simcha), so on Shabbat you should eat bread and either fish, poultry, or meat (but only if you enjoy them).

In order to have a special appetite for our Shabbat evening meal, we don't eat a full meal with bread on Friday afternoon.

Special Shabbat Songs (Zmirot)

Special songs (zmirot) are sung at the various Shabbat meals. Some zmirot have an aspect of prayer to them.

Studying Torah

Studying Torah on Shabbat is another way of increasing our spiritual experience. It honors the Shabbat and should bring about enjoyment of Shabbat.

Shabbat and Muktza

For information on Shabbat and muktza, see section below, [Shabbat: Muktza](#).

Weekday Talk

Don't talk about subjects that are forbidden to do on Shabbat (weekday subjects); for example, don't talk about what you will do after Shabbat is over. There is no prohibition about discussing actions from the past as long as no planning is discussed.