

Laws of Shabbat

Shabbat commemorates the seventh day of creation when God rested, and we are commanded to rest and refrain from work as an acknowledgment of our respect and appreciation. The restrictions on Shabbat are based on the 39 Melachot (categories of prohibited labor) derived from activities performed in the construction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). While some Melachot are less relevant today (e.g., plowing fields), others remain applicable. Below is a detailed guide to the 39 Melachot, followed by practical applications and clarifications for modern observance.

The 39 Melachot of Shabbat

1. **Carrying:** Transporting items between private and public domains or within a public domain.
2. **Burning:** Igniting or maintaining a fire.
3. **Extinguishing:** Putting out a flame or reducing its intensity.
4. **Finishing:** Completing the creation or repair of an item (e.g., assembling or adjusting objects).
5. **Writing:** Creating symbols or letters, including typing and drawing.
6. **Erasing:** Removing writing to prepare for new writing.
7. **Cooking:** Applying heat to food or liquids (e.g., boiling, baking, frying).
8. **Washing:** Cleaning garments or removing stains.
9. **Sewing:** Permanently connecting two materials.
10. **Tearing:** Separating connected materials.
11. **Knotting:** Tying permanent or professional knots.
12. **Untying:** Loosening permanent knots.
13. **Shaping:** Cutting or molding materials into specific forms (rarely applicable today).
14. **Plowing:** Preparing soil for planting.
15. **Planting:** Encouraging plant growth, such as watering plants.

- 16.**Reaping:** Detaching plants from their growth source.
 - 17.**Harvesting:** Gathering crops.
 - 18.**Threshing:** Separating edible parts of plants (includes milking cows).
 - 19.**Winnowing:** Using air to separate desirable materials from waste.
 - 20.**Selecting:** Separating desirable items from undesirable ones by hand (only allowed immediately before eating).
 - 21.**Sifting:** Filtering materials through a sieve or strainer.
 - 22.**Grinding:** Reducing substances to smaller particles (e.g., grating, milling).
 - 23.**Kneading:** Mixing solids and liquids to form a dough or paste.
 - 24.**Combing:** Preparing raw fibers for spinning.
 - 25.**Spinning:** Creating thread or yarn from fibers.
 - 26.**Dyeing:** Changing the color of an object (includes makeup application).
 - 27.**Chainstitching:** Looping threads (e.g., weaving or crocheting).
 - 28.**Warping:** Setting up threads on a loom.
 - 29.**Weaving:** Interlacing threads to create fabric.
 - 30.**Unraveling:** Taking apart woven or knitted materials.
 - 31.**Building:** Assembling structures (includes setting up temporary shelters).
 - 32.**Demolishing:** Taking apart structures.
 - 33.**Trapping:** Capturing living creatures (e.g., insects).
 - 34.**Shearing:** Removing hair, wool, or feathers.
 - 35.**Slaughtering:** Killing any living creature.
 - 36.**Skinning:** Removing an animal's hide.
 - 37.**Tanning:** Treating hides to make leather.
 - 38.**Smoothing:** Polishing surfaces.
 - 39.**Marking:** Creating preparatory lines for cutting or writing.
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Practical Applications

Prohibitions and Allowances:

1. **Carrying:** Prohibited in public areas, like streets and squares, unless there is an Eruv, which renders the area a private domain.
2. **Fire and Cooking:** Avoid lighting or extinguishing flames. Prepare food before Shabbat and keep it warm using permitted methods. Turning off a stove is allowed if it involves only removing the fuel. Electricity is not equated with fire.
3. **Writing and Erasing:** Prohibited when it involves creating or removing significant markings.
4. **Building and Demolishing:** Not allowed, including assembling items permanently. Folding chairs and tables are permitted as they are normal usage. Umbrellas are the same.
5. **Cleaning and Sewing:** Washing clothes, sewing, or altering garments is prohibited.

Common Questions:

- **Bathing:** You may shower or bathe using hot water under 125°F (which is almost every boiler), but avoid using an instant hot water boiler. All regular soaps, shampoos, and conditioners are permitted.
- **Muktzah:** Objects designated exclusively for prohibited activities should not be moved unless necessary for their place or use.
- **Health and Safety:** All restrictions are waived for health or safety concerns. Do not risk well-being for the sake of observing Shabbat.

Traditions and Customs:

1. **Kiddush:** Recite over wine or grape juice on Friday night and Saturday morning.
2. **Meals:** Include two loaves of bread or their equivalent. Two slices of bread works fine.
3. **Dress:** No specific attire is required—clean, respectable clothing is sufficient.

4. **Candles and Havdalah:** Traditional candles on Erev Shabbat are optional. Make the blessing on the electric lights. Havdalah requires wine or grape juice; other items like a candle or spices are customary but not mandatory.

Special Situations:

- **Elevators:** Using non-standard methods (e.g., wrist or elbow) to press buttons is allowed in necessary cases. (Kilachar Yad)
- **Transportation:** Plan in advance; using non-Jewish assistance for carrying or paying is permissible if required.
- **Sorting:** Take what you need and leave the rest; avoid removing undesired items directly.
- **Squeezing:** Avoid juicing fruits except for adding lemon juice to food.

Philosophy of Shabbat

Shabbat is a day of rest, family, and spiritual connection. It is not meant to be burdensome but a time for relaxation, Torah study, and mindfulness. Avoid active business discussions, excessive restrictions, or unnecessary concerns. Observance should foster joy and rejuvenation.

For specific questions, feel free to ask online or via email.

Laws of Shabbat

God created the world in six days and on the seventh day he rested. To commemorate that, and to acknowledge our respect and appreciation, we are required to rest on the Shabbat. We do not do typical work.

The specific restrictions are based on 39 Melachot (activities) that were practiced in the desert when the Jews traveled from Egypt until they came to the Land of Israel. Many of these activities Melachot are not as relevant today. For example, most of us don't plow our fields these days. I will try to address the activities that do apply today.

Here is a structured list of the **39 Melachot** (categories of prohibited labor) on Shabbat, with brief descriptions for each:

The 39 Melachot of Shabbat

1. **Carrying**

Transporting objects between private and public domains or within a public domain is prohibited.

2. **Burning**

Igniting or maintaining a fire.

3. **Extinguishing**

Putting out a flame or reducing its intensity.

4. Finishing

Completing the creation or repair of an item. Includes assembling, adjusting, or fine-tuning objects.

5. Writing

Creating symbols or letters. Includes typing, drawing, and similar actions associated with recording information.

6. Erasing

Removing writing or markings to prepare for rewriting. Tearing through words is included.

7. Cooking

Applying heat to alter a substance, especially food or liquids. Includes boiling, baking, or frying.

8. Washing

Cleaning garments or other materials, including stain removal and soaking.

9. Sewing

Connecting two materials permanently, such as stitching fabric or taping objects.

10. Tearing

Separating connected materials. Includes undoing stitches or glued items.

11. Knotting

Tying a permanent or professional knot. Temporary knots, like shoelaces, are permitted. Most knots that we use today are not permanent.

12. Untying

Loosening permanent knots. Temporary knots may be untied.

13. Shaping

Cutting or molding materials to a specific size or form. Does not apply to food preparation. Very seldom does this apply.

14. Plowing

Preparing soil for planting by digging or tilling.

15. Planting

Encouraging plant growth. Includes sowing seeds, watering plants, or placing flowers in water.

16.Reaping

Harvesting or detaching plants from their growth source. Examples include picking fruit or mowing grass.

17.Harvesting

Gathering or bundling crops or collected items.

18.Threshing

Separating edible parts of a plant from its husk. Includes milking cows or extracting juice from fruits.

19.Winnowing

Using air or wind to separate desirable materials from waste, such as chaff from grain.

20.Selecting

Separating desirable from undesirable items by hand. Allowed if done immediately before eating.

21.Sifting

Filtering unwanted materials through a sieve or strainer.

22.Grinding

Reducing substances to smaller particles. Includes grating, milling, or crushing.

23.Kneading

Combining solid and liquid into a dough or paste. Applies to cooking and crafting materials.

24.Combing

Preparing raw fibers like wool or cotton for spinning.

25.Spinning

Creating thread or yarn from fibers. Includes rope-making.

26.Dyeing

Changing the color of an item. Includes painting or applying makeup.

27.Chainstitching

Creating loops for weaving or crocheting. Includes basket weaving and net making.

28. Warping

Setting up threads on a loom in preparation for weaving.

29. Weaving

Interlacing threads to create fabric. Includes all forms of needlework.

30. Unravelling

Taking apart woven or knitted materials.

31. Building

Assembling or constructing structures. Even setting up a temporary shelter like a tent is included.

32. Demolishing

Taking apart structures or machinery. Temporary dismantling is also prohibited.

33. Trapping

Capturing or restricting a living creature. Includes catching insects.

34. Shearing

Removing hair, wool, or feathers. Includes shaving or plucking eyebrows.

35. Slaughtering

Killing any living creature. Includes causing injury to animals or humans.

36. Skinning

Removing the hide of an animal. Applies to all forms of leather preparation.

37. Tanning

Processing hides to make leather. Includes applying treatments to improve its quality.

38. Smoothing

Polishing or smoothing surfaces, such as shining shoes or polishing metal. Very seldom does this apply.

39. Marking

Creating preparatory lines or markings for cutting or writing.

These categories, derived from the labor needed to construct the Mishkan (Tabernacle), teach us to focus on spiritual rejuvenation and limit creative manipulation of the world on Shabbat.

The following are those issues that affect us nowadays.

Carrying: you cannot carry items in a public street. You cannot carry from a private area to a public area. If there is an Eruv, then it is all considered a private area and you can carry anywhere.

Lighting Fires, Extinguishing a fire, Cooking, & Baking: These are all actions that we must avoid on Shabbat. Prepare before Shabbat. Leave the stove on and keep the food warm in the oven or on the stove. You may however, turn off a gas or electric stove or oven, as you're only removing the fuel and the fire goes out on its own.

Many want to carry this law to electricity, and say that it has the same law as lighting a fire. That is incorrect, as lighting a fire means fire, and we don't add new things.

Writing & Erasing: writing or erasing two block letters are not permitted.

Building & Demolishing & Finishing: Not on Shabbat.

Washing Clothes, Sewing, or Any Part of Making Clothing: Prohibited on Shabbat.

Shabbat is a time for relaxation, for Torah study, and to spend time with family, and take a break from the madness of the work week. It is a great time to meditate and connect to Hashem.

It is not about the restriction, and one should not obsess. It is about taking a break, for health and spiritual awareness.

We make Kidush at night, and in the morning on wine or grape juice. Follow your local customs. We eat bread, and make the blessing on two loaves of bread, two rolls, or even two slices of bread.

There are many things that are not permitted due to rabbinical restrictions, like Muktzah or not going to an ancient bathhouse. Muktzah is complicated. The main idea is that something used exclusively for a Melachah, should not be moved. However, if you need the place where it is, say you have a hammer on the kitchen table, then you can remove it. That is called Tzorech Mekomo (Needs the place). You can also move the hammer and use it if you need it, say to break open a coconut. That is called Tzorech Gufo (need the item itself). There are a lot of complicated aspects here, but this covers 98%.

When it comes to bathing, you can take a shower or a bath in your own home. Using the hot water is not a problem, since it is not over 125 degrees, so it does not count as cooking. The only problem will be if you have an instant hot boiler, then you cannot turn on the water. Because that is a direct action to putting the fire on. You can use any typical soap, shampoo, conditioner, and moisturizer. You can towel dry. You can brush your hair and your teeth. You can use any toothpaste. Don't shave or cut your nails, and don't put on medication that you can put before or after Shabbat.

Any Rabbinical restriction, if there is a doubt (Safek), it is permitted. If you want to go on an elevator, you can push the button with your wrist or elbow. It is the same as asking a non-Jew, so no need. That is called Kilachar Yad. (literally meaning the back of your hand). The concept is that if you do a Rabbinical restriction but not in a normal way, then it is fine when necessary.

Anything to do with health and safety, all the rules are stayed. Don't be a martyr, because you don't get extra points by risking your health or safety.

Stay away from active business discussions. You can discuss hypotheticals or past deals, but avoid active business situations. Shabbat is for relaxation, and to take a break.

There is no special dress code. Ignore all that. No need for a man to dress and look like a German gentleman in the 1930's. Put on some clean clothes and honor the Shabbat. Make a Beracha and put on a light for Shabbat in a room that you will be

using/eating etc. Ashkenazim say the Beracha after they turn on the light. Traditional candles are optional, and secondary.

Please keep your homes clean and neat. NO need to refrain from cleaning up, making the beds, and folding the clothes.

When Shabbat is over, in the US, about thirty minutes after sunset, you make Havdalah. If you have a candle and cloves or a nice smelling herb, then you add that, as it is customary, but it is not required. Just the Havdalah on wine or grape juice.

You can open and close a folding chair or table, as that is the normal way it used and therefore it is not considered building. You can use an umbrella wherever there is an Eruv and it is not considered setting up a tent for the same reason (However, due to their confusion, many people may look at you strangely).

Killing a bug or a fly, if you're afraid of allergy or health issue is fine. Just out of boredom, it should not be done.

Sorting things can be complicated. For instance, taking a batch of blueberries and removing the bad ones would be an issue. Rather take the good ones and leave the bad ones behind.

Don't squeeze oranges to make a glass of orange juice, but you can squeeze a lemon into food.

There are certain things that we restrict very strongly, because of tradition, but from straight Halachah, it is not a problem. If you want to keep these restrictive rules, that's great, but don't force it on others in your family or community. Battery operated and electrical devices do not fit into any of the 39 categories of Melachot.

Use your imagination. The driving of a car, if electric would be similar. Driving a car that is gas, will still not be a De'Oraita (from the Torah) prohibition. If a non-Jew drives you, it would be fine if it is necessary. Again, when there are health or safety issues, don't bat an eyelash, do whatever is required immediately.

You can take a train, plane, or boat on Shabbat. They used to go by boat all the time. People go on cruises. You just need to work on the logistics. You cannot pay for it on Shabbat, but if you have a non-Jew with you, they can handle that. They can carry your stuff, if no Eruv. If there's an Eruv and you buy a ticket in advance, you can even enter the transportation mode on Shabbat itself. You will need to think it through, but technically it can be done and was always done for centuries. If you have such a question, feel free to ask online here or by email if it is private.