

SHABBAT UNPACKED

Session 4

SAFEGUARDING THE SHABBAT

The weekly gift of Shabbat is there to upgrade and enhance our lives immeasurably. From quality time with our family, to time for personal growth, rest, and relaxation, Shabbat provides us the opportunity to live a more meaningful life. Towards that end, the Almighty in His infinite wisdom instituted a set of safeguards to ensure that we remember the value of Shabbat.

How to Safeguard Shabbat

We previously learned (Session 1) that G-d gave us Shabbat with two distinct terms: ***Zachor, Commemorate and Shamor, Safeguard***. These two terms represent the **dos** of Shabbat - **the actions we take to appreciate and honor the day** and the **don'ts** of Shabbat - **the things that we abstain from doing** to create the atmosphere of Shabbat.

The Mechilta teaches us that the Almighty said the words ***Zachor*** and ***Shamor*** at the exact same time (something that is not humanly possible). The idea behind this is that the full Shabbat experience can only endure when **both the dos and the don'ts** of Shabbat are observed.

We already introduced (Session 3) some of the dos of Shabbat that make it a source of blessing. However, the magic of genuine living on Shabbat can only be fully experienced within the parameters and safeguards of the things that we ***don't*** do on Shabbat.

This session will begin to outline the safeguards or “don'ts” of Shabbat.

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The Safeguards

The safeguards of Shabbat are categorized into **39 categories** of prohibited creative labor. The Torah describes these safeguards by saying do not do any work on Shabbat:

לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה כָּל־מְלָאכָה | Do not do any work

(שמות כ"י, Exodus 20:10)

The word “work” here refers to any “creative labor.” An action is considered work if it brings about something new.

The Almighty describes Shabbat by saying “do not do work similar to Me. For you see, I created the world in six days and then rested on the seventh, and so should you.” The logic is as follows: I created for six days, so should **you**, but on the seventh I desisted creation and so should you.

The analogy of our creation to the Almighty creating the world is a bit perplexing. How can we even relate to the Almighty’s creating a world and compare that to our seemingly mundane creative acts?

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Microcosm of Creation: The Mishkan

This is where the brilliance of Torah shines. The Almighty afforded man the opportunity to create a microcosm of the wide world by enabling us to bring the act of Godly creation to the much simpler world of our creativity. The Jewish people constructed that microcosm many years after creation, right after the revelation at Mount Sinai. It was called the Mishkan or Tabernacle, a traveling abode for G-d's Divine Presence, a prequel to the eventual permanent Temple in Jerusalem.

The Mishkan represents a microcosm of the universe. It is a distillation of all the energies, patterns and resources found in the material world. Therefore, as the microcosm of creation, the activities performed in constructing the Mishkan precisely parallel the creative labor performed by the Almighty in creating the world.

WHAT FOLLOWS IS THAT THE CREATIVE
LABORS USED TO CONSTRUCT AND
MAINTAIN THE MISHKAN ARE THE VERY
SAME ACTIVITIES THAT WE REFRAIN
FROM DOING ON SHABBAT.

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The Mishna in Masechet Shabbat 7:2 lists 39 categories of creative labor that were done in connection to constructing the Mishkan. These categories range from agriculture to construction, writing and recording, to food preparation and much more.

We safeguard the Shabbat by abstaining from these 39 categories of creative work. By doing so, we are able to take a step back from the distraction of six days of creating our physical reality, and truly live by enjoying the world that we have created.

Safeguarding the Don'ts

There is one additional concept that is important to introduce before we delve into the actual categories.

The Almighty instructs us:

“Safeguard my safeguards” | ושמרתם את משמרותי

Leviticus 18:30

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This verse was a charge to the collective leadership of the Jewish people throughout the generations to add additional safeguards to the mitzvot of the Torah so that they will not be neglected or disregarded.

A classic example of the above is the Torah prohibition to eat chicken and milk together. By Torah law, only meat of an animal is included in the prohibition of mixing milk and meat. Over the centuries, by eating fowl and milk, people began to blur the lines of fowl and beef. They figured that if a chicken cheese burger is not prohibited by Torah law, then why not eat a beef burger with cheese? To safeguard this important law of kosher, the collective rabbinical leadership got together and forbade fowl and milk. This is called in Jewish law “halacha midirabanan/a rabbinic safeguard.”

To ensure Shabbat observance, there were many safeguards that were added over the generations. We will see a number of these throughout our study.

Creation Through Writing (Category 1 of 39)

To bring the above ideas to life we will begin by focusing on one of the 39 categories; the creative act of **koteiv** or **writing**.

When we transcribe or record ideas we are bringing a potential thought into the world of action. This is the classic idea of a creative act as defined above.

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In the construction of the Mishkan/Tabernacle, the builders wrote numbers on each beam in order to know the appropriate location of the large beams that constituted the walls. Hence, writing is one of the 39 categories of prohibited creative acts.

Included in the Torah prohibition of koteiv/writing is writing letters, numbers, and shapes of any script or language. This prohibition is not exclusive to writing with ink, rather it extends to engraving and etching.

In addition to the actual category of writing there are a number of actions that are Rabbinically prohibited as they could easily lead to writing (safeguards of the safeguards). For example:

1. BUYING OR SELLING
2. LENDING AND BORROWING
3. JUDGING COURT CASES
4. ANALYZING ONE'S FINANCES
5. MEASURING AND WEIGHING

Interestingly, there is a discussion in the contemporary halachic works about whether writing using a digital medium ie. texting, typing, email is included in the category of writing. (Important: There is no discussion whatsoever that one may not use a phone or computer on Shabbat as using electric devices is certainly prohibited, the discussion is only if texting or typing would also be under the category of koteiv/writing. We will discuss electricity and electronics in a subsequent session.)

Please note: The above summary is just a taste of the concept of koteiv or writing. There are many more details and complexities addressed in Jewish law. For practical inquiries, please contact your LOR (local Olami rabbi).



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