SHABBAT UNPACKED

OLAMI MENTORSHIP

Session 14

OVERVIEW:
THE 39 MELACHOT

BURST OF INSPIRATION

Shabbat in the Cattle Car

The sanctity of Shabbat has always held a place of unparalleled importance in Jewish life—even in the darkest moments of history.

In his book titled, The Shabbos, Dayan Grunfeld shares a powerful eyewitness account that captures this truth. This story took place during one of the most horrific chapters of our people's past: the Holocaust.

A packed cattle car, overflowing with Jewish souls, rattled down the tracks toward an unknown but dreaded destination. Crushed together, suffocating in the stench and heat, the passengers could barely move. The despair was thick, and as Friday afternoon wore on, it deepened.

Then, something extraordinary happened.

An elderly Jewish woman, with tremendous effort, shifted within the crowd and opened the small bundle she had brought with her. From it, she slowly pulled out two Shabbat candlesticks and two challahs. That very morning, just before being torn from her home, these were the items she had chosen to take. Nothing else seemed as vital.

There, in the heart of that rolling prison, she lit the Shabbat candles. The glow illuminated faces lined with suffering, and as someone began to sing "Lechah Dodi," the air changed. Amid the pain and fear, the serenity of Shabbat descended.

It didn't matter that they were in a cattle car. For that brief moment, they were home.

THE 39 CATEGORIES

By now, you have unpacked a big part of the week to week Shabbat practicalities. We attempted to present the most relevant of the 39 Avot Melachot/categories of creative work. In an effort to empower you to embrace the magic of Shabbat, we shared the most common of these categories and a brief overview of those particular categories.

In this session, you will have the opportunity to briefly review all of the 39 categories in the order that they are presented by Jewish law.

While we only included the essence of each category, there are many practical details in each of these categories that help form complete Shabbat observance today. We highly encourage you to make the time to continue to learn about each of these categories and gain true mastery in Shabbat observance.

THE 39 MELACHOT:
PROHIBITED LABORS OF SHABBAT

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Agricultural Activities

1. Ploughing (Choresh)
   Preparing soil for planting.
   Examples: ploughing, digging, fertilizing, removing stones.

2. Sowing (Zoreia)
   Causing or promoting plant growth.
   Examples: planting, watering, pruning, grafting, weeding.

3. Reaping (Kotzeir)
   Detaching a plant from its source of growth.
   Examples: picking fruits, flowers, leaves.

4. Gathering (Me'amer)
   Collecting natural products into one place.
   Examples: bundling stalks, piling fruits, gathering herbs.

5. Threshing (Dash)
   Separating a usable product from its casing.
   Examples: shelling peas, squeezing grapes, cracking nuts.

6. Winnowing (Zoreh)
   Using wind or air to separate undesirable parts.
   Example: tossing grain to remove chaff.

THE 39 MELACHOT:
PROHIBITED LABORS OF SHABBAT

7. Selecting (Borer)
   Choosing and removing unwanted parts from a mixture.
   Examples: picking out spoiled fruit, straining liquids.

8. Sifting (Meraked)
   Separating fine from coarse particles.
   Examples: sifting flour, straining soup.

9. Grinding (Tochen)
   Breaking a solid into small usable parts.
   Examples: grinding spices, dicing vegetables finely, grating.

Food Preparation & Cooking

10. Kneading (Losh)
    Combining particles with a liquid to form a dough or paste.
    Examples: making dough, mixing paste.

11. Baking/Cooking (Ofeh/Bishul)
    Using heat to improve or change the state of food.
    Examples: baking, boiling, roasting.
    Note: Warm food may be kept on a covered flame prepared before Shabbos.

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Animal & Fiber Preparation

12. Shearing (Gozez)
    Removing growth from people or animals.
    Examples: cutting hair, nails, wool.

13. Bleaching (Melabein)
    Cleaning or whitening fabric.
    Examples: soaking, scrubbing, stain removal.

14. Combing (Menapetz)
    Separating fibers from raw material.
    Examples: combing wool, beating flax.

15. Dyeing (Tzovea)
    Changing or enhancing an object's color.
    Examples: dyeing fabric, painting.

16. Spinning (Toveh)
    Twisting fibers into thread or string.
    Examples: spinning yarn, making rope.

THE 39 MELACHOT:
PROHIBITED LABORS OF SHABBAT

Weaving Operations

17. Warping – Setting threads on a loom.

18. Weaving – Interlacing threads.

19. Finishing – Tightening or cutting woven material.
    Examples: knitting, embroidering, braiding, basket-weaving.

20. Separating Threads (Mafrid)
    Undoing woven or knitted materials.
    Example: unraveling a sweater.

Tying & Fastening

21. Tying (Kosher)
    Making a permanent knot.
    Example: tying a secure knot, double-knotting shoelaces.

22. Untying (Matir)
    Undoing a permanent knot.
    Example: untying ropes or cords or knotted shoelaces.

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PROHIBITED LABORS OF SHABBAT

Construction & Clothing

23. Sewing (Tofer)
    Joining materials together permanently.
    Examples: sewing, gluing fabric.

24. Tearing (Kore'a)
    Separating joined materials to enable sewing.
    Example: ripping a seam or perforation (i.e. toilet paper).

Hunting & Processing Hides

25. Trapping (Tzad)
    Restricting movement of a creature.
    Examples: catching insects or animals.

26. Slaughtering (Shochet)
    Causing death or drawing blood from a living creature.
    Examples: killing insects, taking blood samples.

27. Skinning (Mafshit)
    Removing skin from a dead animal.
    Examples: skinning, removing hide.

28. Tanning (Me'abeid)
    Making hides usable or durable.
    Examples: processing leather.

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29. Scraping (Memachek)
Smoothing a surface.
Examples: sanding, polishing.

Writing & Marking

30. Marking (Mesarteit)
Drawing lines to guide cutting or writing.
Examples: marking parchment.

31. Cutting to Shape (Mechateich)
Altering size or shape for use.
Examples: cutting paper, sharpening pencils.

32. Writing (Koseiv)
Making meaningful and lasting marks.
Examples: writing, drawing.
Note: Includes drawing with fingers on foggy surfaces.

33. Erasing (Mocheik)
Clearing space for new writing.
Examples: erasing text.

THE 39 MELACHOT:
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Building & Final Work

34. Building (Boneh)
    Constructing or assembling a structure.
    Examples: assembling furniture, pitching a tent.

35. Demolishing (Soter)
    Destroying to allow for construction.
    Examples: tearing down a wall.

36. Kindling a Fire (Maavir)
    Creating or intensifying heat or fire.
    Examples: lighting a flame, turning on lights.

37. Extinguishing a Fire (Mechabeh)
    Reducing or ending a flame.
    Examples: turning off lights, blowing out candles.

38. Final Touch (Makeh B'Patish)
    Completing or repairing an item.
    Examples: fixing appliances, cutting tags.

Transferring Objects

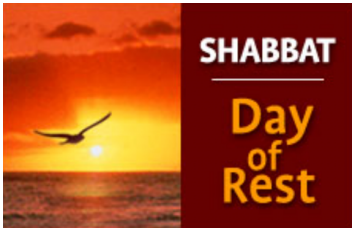
39. Carrying (Hotzaah)
    Transferring objects between domains or within a public domain.
    Examples: carrying from home to the street.
    Private domain = enclosed area. Public domain = open, frequented area.

KEEP LEARNING!

There are many books and resources that discuss the 39 categories in a more comprehensive fashion.

Here are a few that we recommend for further study (with or without your mentor!):

Laws Of Shabbat



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Learn Shabbos in just 3 minutes a day

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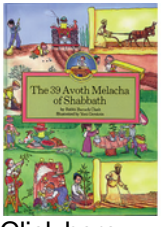
The 39 Avoth Melacha of Shabbath



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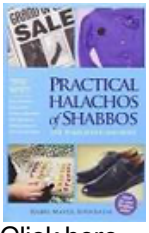
Practical Halachos of Shabbos



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