

Shabbat

Thirty-Nine Categories of Work

1. Carrying	20. Selecting
2. Burning	21. Sifting
3. Extinguishing	22. Grinding
4. Finishing	23. Kneading
5. Writing	24. Combing
6. Erasing	25. Spinning
7. Cooking	26. Dyeing
8. Washing	27. Chain-stitching
9. Sewing	28. Warping
10. Tearing	29. Weaving
11. Knotting	30. Unraveling
12. Untying	31. Building
13. Shaping	32. Demolishing
14. Plowing	33. Trapping
15. Planting	34. Shearing
16. Reaping	35. Slaughtering
17. Harvesting	36. Skinning
18. Threshing	37. Tanning
19. Winnowing	38. Smoothing
<i>Talmud - Mas. Shabbath 73a</i>	39. Marking

Where the Prohibitions Come From

Ceasing from “creating”. There is a symbolic mirror between God’s creation of the world and the work of the construction of the Tabernacle (mishkan). See Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 31:1-11. This is how rabbis were able to increase the size of the “fence” around the Torah. This is codified in Talmud - Mas. Shabbath 73a.

Balance of Power

There is a balance against the prohibitions of Shabbat called “oneg Shabbat”. This is the idea that Shabbat is a day of celebration, not severity. Shabbat observance allows for work that increases joy on Shabbat, while being mindful to the letter of the law. Examples include eating hot food on Shabbat that is kept warm overnight (such as cholent).

Modern Application

Very few people have problems on Shabbat with harvesting or sifting, which speak to our agricultural past. But laws around issues like turning on/off lights or driving on Shabbat come from interpretations of these earlier prohibitions.

Electricity is a common issue. It’s a misbelief that rabbinic Judaism teaches that electricity is fire. Rather, it’s that modern people use electricity in the way that earlier people used fire. Drawing parallels like this is permitted since Shabbat as a refraining from “creative” work is in itself a parallel.

What You Can Do On Shabbat

Shabbat is not meant to be a solemn or boring day. In addition to Shabbat’s religious observances, Shabbat should include time for reading, socializing with friends and family, eating, drinking, going for walks, napping and playing games.