

# Shabbat

*More than the Jews have preserved Shabbat observance, Shabbat has preserved the Jews.*<sup>1</sup>

**What is Shabbat?** *Shabbat* (“Sabbath” in English) is an “Island in Time” created by the Jewish People each week. It is ordained in the Torah in Exodus 20:8, “*Keep (shamor) the Sabbath Day ...*”; and Deuteronomy 5:12 “*Remember (zahor) the Sabbath day ...*” Remembering *Shabbat* occurs in the prayers of the liturgy of the day. Keeping *Shabbat* is found in resting and in the halakhic rules of *Shabbat* as follows.

**When is Shabbat?** It is the seventh day of the week, beginning with the candle lighting 18 minutes before sundown on Friday night, and ending with *Havdalah* after nightfall Saturday when three stars can be seen in the night sky.

**Shevut “Rest”** *Shabbat* is a day of “holy rest” in which we are to be in imitation of God, who rested on the seventh day after the Creation. One spends time at religious services, and shares time with friends, family, guests, as well as studying. It is a *mitzvah* to take an afternoon nap. Friday evening is for family, Friday night is for spouse, Saturday morning is for community, Saturday afternoon is for Study and rest, *Shabbat* at sundown is for meditation and restoration of self. We avoid “work” (*m'lakha*), outlined by the 39 varieties of work outlined in the Mishnah and the Talmud. One does not go his/her business, Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, “He who wants to enter the holiness of the day must first lay down the profanity of clattering commerce, of being yoked to toil. He must go away from the screech of dissonant days, from the nervousness and fury of acquisitiveness and the betrayal in embezzling his own life.”<sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup> Rabbi Louis Jacobs wrote, “‘Work’ in this context does not mean excessive manual effort, but rather any act through which human beings exercise creative control over nature.

**Carrying and Domain** One may not carry objects from one “domain” to another. There are four domains, Public, Private, a *Karmelit*, and “A Free Place.” A practical example is carrying a musical instrument out of one’s home. One may not carry it into the synagogue from the street, even if it is to be used in the synagogue after *Havdalah* Saturday night.

**Muktzeh** Objects normally used for activities proscribed on *Shabbat*; For example, pens, pencils, money, hammers, saws, are *muktzeh*, to be “set aside” and not handled, except for use in purposes necessary and permissible on *Shabbat*.

**Fire, Electric Lights, and Automatic Devices** Combustion, kindling a fire, prolonging it, or transferring it is prohibited. One may not modify the intensity of a cooking or lighting fire. For Conservative Jews, electric lights are not considered “fire” and may be turned off and on. For Orthodox Jews electric lights *are* fire and will require automatic timing devices set up *before Shabbat* to turn them on. Automation is permitted provided the machinery was set in motion before the onset of *Shabbat*.

**Travel** Beyond a person’s domain is forbidden. [Foot] Travel within a city is permitted, however. For Conservative Jews, driving a car is to be limited to travel to and from the synagogue for services. Travel on ship is permitted if the vessel has departed on a weekday, and one is already enroute during *Shabbat*. If the ship is leaving on *Shabbat*, one must board before *Shabbat*.

**Preparation of Food** Cooking is defined as making raw food edible and is proscribed on *Shabbat*. All food to be consumed on *Shabbat* is to already cooked and prepared, and water already boiled. Warming is permitted for solid foods, liquids which are not entirely cold, liquids that are entirely cold may be warmed over a low fire. The fire used for warming must be covered to avoid tampering with it. A tin plate, called a *blech* may be used for this purpose. One can use modern electric appliances set before *Shabbat*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ahad haAm* from Joel Roth’s, “Shabbat and the Holidays”

<sup>2</sup> Heschel, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to the late Rabbi Louis Jacobs, *The Book of Jewish Practice* (West Orange NJ: Behrman House, 1987) pp. 74-80 .

**Treatment of the Sick** The rabbis established the principle of *pikuah nefesh doha et haShabbat*, “the saving of life supersedes any restrictions due to the Sabbath (Talmud, *Yoma* 85a; *Shabbat* 132a).” This extends to attending a woman in labor, taking one’s necessary medicine, as well as rescuing drowning persons or saving someone a building has collapsed upon.

Visits to the sick and condolence calls are permissible and even encouraged, even though these visits may detract from the joy of the day.

**Sports and Amusements** Games which involve no infringements of the laws about ‘work’ are allowed on the Sabbath, e.g. card games, chess, billiards, ping-pong, scrabble (to put the letters together to form words does not constitute ‘writing’), and ball games in one’s own home. When playing games on the Sabbath there must be no writing down of the score and no playing for money.”<sup>4</sup> Ball playing in a private domain, or anywhere that carrying is allowed is permissible, where there are no other violations. Certain kinds of Yoga and Gymnastics are also permitted. Bathing in a pool in a private domain is also permitted; in an open space it is also permitted but with some restrictions, i.e. one should dry oneself before fully leaving the water. Swimming and exercise is permitted but not to the point of overexertion.

**A Gentile Working For A Jew** We may not ask a non-Jew to do anything on the Sabbath that we may not do ourselves (*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Shabbat* 24:4). Exceptions are: Illness or other emergencies, lighting a fire in cold weather, to relieve an animal in pain, situations where the act is done by the non-Jew for his own purpose, even though a Jew may benefit. If the non-Jew is independent, is paid for the job as a whole, is not told to specifically work on *Shabbat*, he may do his work (*Shulhan Arukh Orekh Hayyim*, 244:5, 252:2)

**Miscellaneous Rules** It is permissible to use an article that has arrived in the mail on *Shabbat*. One may make soup by pouring hot water over bouillon cubes or powder. Cans and barrels may be opened on *Shabbat* if their contents are to be used on that day. It is permissible to wash dishes if the dishes are to be used on that day. Detergents may be used, but abrasive cleaners that may scratch the surface may not be used. One may briefly sweep the floor and tidy the house. Photography is not allowed on *Shabbat*. Weddings may not take place on *Shabbat*, but *brit milah* must, if the eighth day after birth occurs on that particular *Shabbat*.

**Preparation For *Shabbat*.** *Sefer Hasidim* says: “It is incumbent on every person to be very, very zealous in making the *Shabbat* preparations, to be prompt and diligent as a person who has heard that the queen is coming to lodge at his or her house ...<sup>5</sup> One should clean and tidy the house, make certain that there is enough prepared food, that beds and rooms are prepared, clothes for the day are cleaned and pressed, provisions for heat are in place (or nowadays, that climate control is set). Set devices that are to turn on automatically. One should bathe on the eve of *Shabbat* so as to enter the day clean and well-groomed. If one must drive to services, be certain on Friday to have the tank filled with gas, the tires filled and in good condition, and all the other things necessary in place for a safe uninterrupted trip. It is expected that one should dress in their best clothing in honor of *Shabbat*.”

## Sources For Further Study

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath, Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1951) p. 8.

Rabbi Joel Roth, essay: “Shabbat and the Holidays” in *Etz Hayim Torah and Commentary* (New York: JPS, 2001) pp.1454-55.

Rabbi Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (New York: JTS, 1979)

Reuvain Hammer, *Or Hadash, A Commentary on Siddur Sim Shalom, For Shabbat and Festivals* (New York; The Rabbinical Assembly, 2003).

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> *Sefer Hasidim*, text of Yehudah HeHasid of the 12th century German *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, Paragraph 149.