

Sefer Zemanim

Hilkhot Shabbath

Chapter 2

1 The commandment of the Sabbath, like all other commandments, may be set aside if human life is in danger. Accordingly, if a person is dangerously ill, whatever a skilled local physician considers necessary may be done for him on the Sabbath.

If it is uncertain whether the Sabbath needs to be violated or not, or if one physician says that violation is necessary and another says that it is not, the Sabbath should be violated, for the mere possibility of danger to human life overrides the Sabbath.

2 If it is estimated on the Sabbath that a certain treatment is necessary and will have to be continued for eight days, one should not say, “Let us wait until evening, so as not to violate two Sabbaths”; rather one should begin the treatment from the very Sabbath day, and as long as treatment is necessary and danger—or possibility of danger—persists, even a hundred Sabbaths may be violated. One may light a lamp extinguish a lamp that is disturbing the patient, slaughter an animal, bake, cook, or heat water for the patient to drink or to wash with. In general, insofar as the needs of a person who is dangerously ill are concerned, the Sabbath is the same as a weekday.

3 When such things have to be done, they should not be left to heathens, minors, slaves, or women, lest these should come to regard Sabbath observance as a trivial matter. They should rather be done by adult and scholarly Israelites. Furthermore, it is forbidden to delay such violation of the Sabbath for the sake of a person who is dangerously ill, for Scripture says, “which if a man do, he shall live by them” (Lev. 18:5), that is to say, he shall not die by them. Hence you learn that the ordinances of the Law were meant to bring upon the world not vengeance, but mercy, lovingkindness, and peace. It is of heretics—who assert that this is nevertheless a violation of the Sabbath and therefore prohibited—that Scripture says, “Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and ordinances whereby they should not live” (Ezek. 20:25).

Chapter 21

1 When Scripture says, “But on the seventh day you shall rest” (Ex. 23:12), it implies that one must refrain also from doing things which are not actual work. Such activities, prohibited by the sages on the ground that they conflict with the spirit of Sabbath rest, are many, some being forbidden because of their resemblance to prohibited kinds of work, others being forbidden as a preventive measure, lest they should lead to the doing of work that is prohibited under penalty of stoning. These activities are enumerated in the following sections.

Chapter 24

1 Some acts are forbidden on the Sabbath even though they neither resemble nor lead to prohibited work. Why then were they forbidden? Because Scripture says, “If you turn away your foot because of the Sabbath, from pursuing your business on My holy day . . . And you shall honor it, not doing your wonted ways, nor pursuing your business, nor speaking thereof” (Is. 58:13). Accordingly, one is forbidden to go anywhere on the Sabbath in connection with his business, or even to talk about it. Thus one may not discuss with his partner what to sell on the next day, or what to buy, or how to construct a certain house, or what merchandise to take to such-and-such a place. All this and its like are forbidden, because Scripture says “nor speaking thereof”; speech is thus forbidden, but thinking of business is permitted.

2 One may not go to visit his vegetable gardens or his fields on the Sabbath in order to ascertain what they need or to observe the state of the crops, because this constitutes a walk in pursuit of his business. Similarly, one may not walk on the Sabbath to the end of the Sabbath limit and then stay there until nightfall, in order to be nearer to the place where he has business to attend to after the termination of the Sabbath, because this, too, would constitute a walk on the Sabbath in pursuit of his business.

4 . . . Prolonged idle conversation is forbidden on the Sabbath, for when Scripture says, “nor speaking thereof,” it indicates that one’s conversation on the Sabbath should not be the same as on weekdays.

5 It is permissible to run on the Sabbath in order to perform a religious duty, for example, to run to the synagogue or to the school-house. One may also make any calculation or take any measurement that is required for a religious purpose. For example, one may measure a ritual bath to discover whether it contains the prescribed minimum quantity of water, or a piece of cloth to see whether it is large enough to be susceptible of ritual uncleanness. One may also allot charity to the poor or walk to the synagogue or to the school-house—or even to a Gentile theater or hall—to attend to affairs of public concern on the Sabbath. One may discuss the betrothal of a young girl, arrange for a boy to be taught book-learning or a trade, visit the sick, or comfort people in mourning. If one visits a sick person on the Sabbath he should say, “It is Sabbath, and so I may not utter a supplication for your suffering; but your cure will come very soon!”

One may wait for nightfall at the end of the Sabbath limit in order to attend to the needs of a bride or to provide for the burial of the dead—that is, to bring a coffin or a shroud for him. In such circumstances one may say to another person, “Go to such-and-such a place first, and if you cannot get what is needed there, get it at this other place,” or “If you cannot procure it for one hundred *zuz*, pay two hundred”; so long as no exact price is mentioned. All such acts and similar ones are permissible because they involve religious duties, and when Scripture says, “from pursuing business” (Is. 58:13), it implies that one’s own business is forbidden, but God’s business is permitted.

12 The sages have forbidden the moving of certain articles on the Sabbath in the way they are moved on weekdays. Why did they enact such a prohibition? The sages reasoned

thus: inasmuch as the prophets have admonished us and commanded us not to walk on the Sabbath in the way we walk on weekdays, nor to converse on the Sabbath in the way we converse on weekdays—for Scripture says “nor speaking thereof” (Is. 58:13)—how much more should one refrain from moving articles on the Sabbath in the way they are moved on weekdays, in order that he should not regard the Sabbath as if it were a weekday, and so be led to lift and rearrange articles from one corner to another or from one room to another, or to put stones out of the way, or do similar things. For since one is at leisure and at home, he would look about for some occupation, and the result would be that he would not rest at all, and would disregard the Scriptural reason for the Sabbath, namely, “that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you” (Deut. 5:14).

13 Moreover, if he were to examine and move utensils used for prohibited work he might absent-mindedly handle them a little and thus be led to do prohibited work. Another reason is that there are people who have no trade or craft, but spend their whole life in idleness, such as loafer and loungers at street corners who refrain from doing work all their lives. If it were permissible to walk and talk and handle articles on the Sabbath in the ordinary weekday manner, such people would not be recognizably resting on the Sabbath at all. Accordingly, abstention from the aforementioned acts is the one form of rest which is applicable to all persons alike. It is for all these reasons that the sages have enacted a prohibition against moving articles about and, as will be explained in subsequent chapter, forbade one to move on the Sabbath any article not actually required.

Chapter 30

1 Four duties have been formulated with reference to the Sabbath, two on Scriptural authority, and two on the authority of the scribes, being explicitly mentioned in the prophets. Scripture says “Remember” (Ex. 20:8) and “Observe” (Deut. 5:12), while the prophets explicitly mention “Honor and Delight” in the verse, “And call the Sabbath a delight, and the holy of the Lord clothed with honor” (Is. 58:13).

2 What is meant by “honor”? This is explained by the statement of the sages that in order to honor the Sabbath one should, as a matter of religious duty, wash his face, hands, and feet with hot water on Friday, wrap himself in a fringed garment, and sit in a dignified manner waiting to receive the Sabbath, just as if one were going forth to meet the king. Indeed, the sages of old used to assemble their disciples on Friday night, put on their best clothes, and say, “Come, let us go forth to meet Sabbath, the king.”

3 Honoring the Sabbath involves also putting on clean clothes, so as not to wear the same clothes on both weekdays and Sabbaths. If one has no other change of clothes, he should let down his cloak, so that it would not look the same as it does on weekdays. Moreover, Ezra has enacted the rule that in honor of the Sabbath people should wash their clothes on Thursdays.

4 In order that the Sabbath should be suitably honored, it is forbidden to set a banquet or a drinking party for Friday afternoon. Furthermore, while eating and drinking are permissible until nightfall, one should, in honor of the Sabbath, refrain from having a regular meal from the time of the afternoon prayer onward, in order to enter into the Sabbath with an appetite for food.

5 One should set his table properly for Friday night, even if he feels no need for more than an olive's bulk of food. Similarly, one should set his table properly at the end of the Sabbath, even if he requires no more than an olive's bulk of food—in order to honor the Sabbath at both its commencement and its termination. One should also, in honor of the Sabbath, get his room ready while it is still day on Friday, by having a lamp lit, a table laid, and a couch properly spread. For all these are marks of reverence for the Sabbath.

6 Even if one is a person of very high rank and does not as a rule attend to the marketing or the other household chores, he should nevertheless himself perform one of these tasks in preparation for the Sabbath, for that is his way of honoring it. There were some among the sages of old who slit firewood for the cooking; others cooked or salted meat, plaited wicks, lit lamps, or went to market to buy food or drink for the Sabbath, although none of these sages customarily performed such tasks on weekdays. Indeed, the more one does in the way of such preparation, the more praiseworthy he is.

7 What is Sabbath's delight? This is explained by the statement of the sages that one should prepare for the Sabbath the richest victuals and the choicest beverages that one can afford. The more one spends for the Sabbath and for the preparation of numerous and tasty dishes, the more praiseworthy he is. If, however, one cannot afford this, it is sufficient to make the Sabbath a delight to prepare even a plain vegetable stew, or the like. For one is not obligated to humiliate himself by begging from others in order to provide a large quantity of food for the Sabbath, and indeed the sages of old have said: "Make your Sabbath as a weekday, just so you depend not upon the charity of others."

8 If a person has been reared in luxury and wealth, so that all of his days are like a Sabbath, he should make his Sabbath food differ in some way from weekday food. If no change is possible, he should at least vary the times of his meals, by eating late if he usually eats early, or early if he usually eats late.

9 It is one's duty to eat three meals on the Sabbath, one in the evening, one in the morning, and one in the afternoon; he should be particularly careful to have no less than these three meals. Even an indigent person living on charity should eat three meals on the Sabbath. If, however, an abundance of food makes one ill, or if one fasts regularly, he is exempt from the duty of eating three meals.

At each of the three meals one should have wine to drink and two whole loaves for the benediction over the breaking of the bread. The same rule applies to festive meals.

10 If one can afford it, eating meals and drinking wine on the Sabbath constitutes Sabbath's delight. It is, however, forbidden to have one's meal with wine on a Sabbath or festival during the time of the lecture in the schoolhouse, and so the custom of the

righteous men of old was as follows: On Sabbath morning one would go to the synagogue for the morning service and the additional Sabbath service, then return home to eat the second meal, then go to the schoolhouse and read Scripture and Mishnah until the afternoon, then recite the afternoon service, and finally return home and sit down to the third Sabbath meal—which would include wine—eating and drinking until the termination of the Sabbath.

15 Observance of the Sabbath and abstention from idolatry are each equivalent to the sum total of all other commandments of the Law. Furthermore, the Sabbath is an eternal sign between the Holy One, blessed be He, and ourselves. Accordingly, if one transgresses any of the other commandments he is merely a wicked Israelite, but if he publicly desecrates the Sabbath he is the same as an idol worshiper, although both of these are regarded as heathens in every respect. Hence the prophet says in praise of the Sabbath observer, “Happy is the man that does this, and the son of man that holds fast by it: that keeps the Sabbath from profaning it,” etc. (Is. 56:2). Furthermore, with regard to him who observes the Sabbath in full accordance with the rules thereof, and honors it and delights in it to the utmost of his ability, the prophet describes explicitly his reward in this world, over and above the reward laid up for him in the world to come, in the following verse: “Then shall you delight yourself in the Lord, and I will make you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it” (Is. 58:14).