YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

**Rav Elchanan Samet**

**PARASHAT VAYAKHEL**

**The Labors of Shabbat and the Labors of the *Mishkan***

**I. The 39 *Avot Melakhot* – "They correspond to the forms of labor in the *Mishkan*"**

Three *Amoraim* were discussing the laws of Shabbat and were called upon to address the following question:

That which is taught in the Mishna (*Shabbat* 7:2), “The principal categories of labors [*avot melakhot*]are forty minus one” – to what do they correspond? (*Shabbat* 49b)

The prohibition of doing work on Shabbat appears many times in the Torah, but only a few types of prohibited labor are explicitly mentioned. For instance, we read at the beginning of our *parasha*: "You shall kindle no fire in all your dwellings on the day of Shabbat" (*Shemot* 35:3), and in *Parashat Ki-Tisa*: "but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest" (*Shemot* 34:21).[[1]](#footnote-1) How then did the Mishna arrive at the conclusion that the thirty-nine labors it lists are included in the Torah's prohibition of working on Shabbat?

One of the three *Amoraim* – Rabbi Chanina bar Chama – answered his colleagues:[[2]](#footnote-2) "They correspond to the forms of labor in the *Mishkan*," i.e., to the labors performed in the construction of the *Mishkan.*

In the continuation of the passage, the Gemara brings a supporting *baraita*:

It was taught in a *baraita*: Liability is incurred only for work of which the same was performed in the *Mishkan*. They sowed, hence you must not sow; they reaped, hence you must not reap;[[3]](#footnote-3) they lifted up the boards from the ground [a public domain] to the wagon [a private domain], hence you must not carry in from a public to a private domain; they lowered the boards from the wagon to the ground, hence you must not carry out from a private to a public domain…."[[4]](#footnote-4)

This connection between the labors performed in the *Mishkan* and the labors prohibited on Shabbat is mentioned several times in tractate *Shabbat* as a given. There are a number of laborsmentioned in the Mishna about which the Gemara asks: "Where was such-and-such laborfound in the *Mishkan*?"[[5]](#footnote-5)

The distinction between principal categories of labor [*avot*] and derivative categories [*toldot*] also depends on the particular labors performed in the *Mishkan*,[[6]](#footnote-6) as does the internal differentiation between similar categories of labor.[[7]](#footnote-7)

What is the meaning of this connection between the labors that are prohibited on Shabbat and the labors that were performed in the *Mishkan*? Why is it clear to the *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* in tractate *Shabbat* that the source for the labors prohibited on Shabbat is to be found in the building of the *Mishkan*?

**II. The building of the *Mishkan* – "On a weekday, and not on Shabbat"**

The mitzvaof Shabbat appears twice in the *parashot* dealing with the *Mishkan*. The first instance is at the end of the long commandment regarding the building of the *Mishkan*. That commandment spans *Parashot Teruma*, *Tetzaveh*, and the beginning of *Ki Tisa*, and concludes with the mitzvaof Shabbat: "Verily you shall keep My *Shabbatot*… every one that profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people" (*Shemot* 31:12-17). The *shiur* for [*Parashat Ki-Tisa*](https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-shemot/parashat-ki-tisa/ki-tisa-shabbat-and-mishkan)in my first series of studies on the weekly *parasha* is dedicated to this command.[[8]](#footnote-8) In the first part of that study, I demonstrated at length that the purpose of placing the commandment regarding Shabbat there is to prohibit the building of the *Mishkan* on Shabbat. Even though this is not explicitly stated there in the verses, nor did the Sages in their *midrashim* comment about it,[[9]](#footnote-9) the Biblical commentators, both medieval and modern, say this and adduce proofs from the wording of the commandment and from the context in which it appears. I cited their words and even added to them, and the interested reader can find all this in the first section of that study.

The second mention of the mitzva of Shabbat is at the beginning of *Parashat Vayakhel* (*Shemot* chapter 35):

1: And Moshe assembled all the congregation of the children of Israel, and said to them: These are the words which the Lord has commanded, to do them.

2: Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day, a sabbath of solemn rest to the Lord; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.

3: You shall kindle no fire in all your dwellings on the day of Shabbat.

4: And Moshe spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: This is the thing which the Lord commanded, saying:

5: Take from among you a gift to the Lord…

Verse 1 serves as an introduction to the commandment to build the *Mishkan*: "These are the words which the Lord has commanded, **to do them**." In verse 2, in a parenthetical remark which continues until the end of verse 3, Moshe instructs the people of Israel about the mitzvaof Shabbat.

The insertion of the mitzvaof Shabbat in a parenthetical remark in verses 2-3 is the reason that Moshe's command regarding the building of the *Mishkan* starts anew in verse 4 with the words: "And Moshe spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying," and from there the command continues directly: "Take you from among you a gift to the Lord."

Why did Moshe insert the mitzvaof Shabbat at the beginning of his commandment regarding the building of the *Mishkan*, in such an unusual manner as a parenthetical remark? The Ramban explains this as follows:

The expression, "These are the words which the Lord has commanded, that you should do them," refers to the construction of the *Mishkan*, its vessels, and all its various works. He preceded [the explanation of the construction of the *Mishkan*] with the law of Shabbat, meaning to say that the work of these words should be done during the six days, but not on the seventh day, which is holy to God. It is from here that we learn the principle that the work of the *Mishkan* does not set aside Shabbat. (Ramban, *Shemot* 35:1, s.v. *Eleh ha-devarim*)

This connection between the mitzva of Shabbat and the commandment regarding the work of the *Mishkan*, which is interpreted as a limitation of the time for building the *Mishkan*, is *almost* explicit in these verses, in the way the mitzva of Shabbat is integrated into the beginning of the commandment regarding the building of the *Mishkan*. For this reason, the Sages in *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael* commented on this connection specifically at the beginning of *Parashat Vayakhel*, and not in connection with the mitzvaof Shabbat in *Parashat Ki Tisa*:

"And Moshe assembled" – Why was this section stated? Since it is stated: "And make Me a sanctuary" (*Shemot* 25:8), I might understand [that I should do that work] both on a weekday and on Shabbat – and how to I reconcile: "Everyone that profanes [Shabbat] shall surely be put to death" (ibid. 31:14)? As regarding all *other* labors, to the exclusion of work on the *Mishkan*…

Therefore the verse states: "And Moshe assembled…" – on a weekday, and not on Shabbat. (*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*, *Mesekhta de-Shabbeta* 2)

This interpretation was adopted by all of the commentators who focus on the *peshat* (plain meaning of Scripture), both medieval and modern.

This interpretation of the mitzvaof Shabbat in *Parashat Vayakhel* proves in retrospect that the command about Shabbat in *Parashat Ki-Tisa* was also stated in this context and for the same purpose.[[10]](#footnote-10) When Moshe came to command the people of Israel about the building of the *Mishkan*, he began with the end of the commandment that he himself had received from God. Why did he do this? He did this because of the practical, goal-oriented nature of his words to Israel: the prohibition of working on Shabbat with respect to the building of the *Mishkan* is something that must be known even before we approach the work itself. In God's commandment, on the other hand, the mitzvaof Shabbat is found at the end of the command, because its connection to the building of the *Mishkan* is only by way of contrast, to teach that Shabbat is not set aside for the construction of the *Mishkan.*[[11]](#footnote-11)

**III. Rashi's explanation of the words of Rabbi Chanina**

Rashi, in his commentary to the Talmud on the passage we cited above in section I (49b, s.v. *ke-neged avodot ha-Mishkan*), explains Rabbi Chanina bar Chama’s assertion based on this connection in the verses between the mitzvaof Shabbat and the command to build the *Mishkan*:

The section dealing with Shabbat is juxtaposed to the section dealing with the work of the *Mishkan* to learn from it.

That is to say, the double juxtaposition of the section dealing with Shabbat to the section dealing with the labors performed in the *Mishkan* comes to teach us to infer from the section dealing with the *Mishkan* what the labors are that are prohibited on Shabbat.

There is a certain difficulty in Rashi’s words: The section dealing with Shabbat is juxtaposed to the section dealing with the work of the *Mishkan*, not to teach us about the laws of Shabbat, but to limit the time for building the *Mishkan* to a weekday, to the exclusion of Shabbat.

It is true that from this time limit on the building of the *Mishkan*,it can be inferred that the labors needed for the building of the *Mishkan* are all prohibited on Shabbat – for if not, it would be permissible to continue building the *Mishkan* through performance of those labors that are not prohibited on Shabbat. But Rabbi Chanina bar Chama says in the other direction that *only* those labors that were needed for the building of the *Mishkan* are prohibited on Shabbat – which does not follow from the juxtaposition of the sections about Shabbat and the building of the *Mishkan* as it was understood by *Chazal* and the Biblical commentators.

How then do we know that the prohibitions of Shabbat do not include additional labors, that were not part of the building of the *Mishkan*?[[12]](#footnote-12)

Once again, we are faced with the question: What is the essential connection between the labors that are prohibited on Shabbat and the labors that were performed in the building of the *Mishkan*, to the point that it is clear from the words of the Sages that there is a perfect overlap between them?

**IV. The order of the *melakhot* in the Mishna, and its meaning**

Careful examination of the *mishna* that enumerates the "forty minus one" principal categories of labor that are prohibited on Shabbat (*Shabbat* 7:2) can teach us about the source of this list of labors and make our question even more difficult.

The list of prohibited labors in the Mishna is divided into five groups:

1. Labors connected to the making of bread: 11 labors associated with the bread-making process, in order, from sowing and plowing to kneading and baking.[[13]](#footnote-13)

2. Labors connected to the making of cloth: 13 labors associated with the cloth-making process, in order, from the shearing of wool to the sewing of the curtains.[[14]](#footnote-14)

3. Labors connected to the making of a book: 9 labors associated with the (parchment) book-making process, in order, from the trapping of a deer to writing on its tanned hide.[[15]](#footnote-15) (Compare with the *aggada* about how Rabbi Chiyya brought about that the Torah would not be forgotten by Israel; *Bava Metzia* 85b.)

4. Labors connected to the building of a house: only 2 labors, building and demolishing.

5. 4 general labors, connected to several labors in the previous realms: extinguishing a fire, kindling a fire, striking a final hammer blow, and carrying from one domain to another.

What is the common denominator of all these actions that are defined as labors that are prohibited on Shabbat?

These actions are the main actions that a civilized person must do to fulfill his basic needs: "bread to eat and a garment to wear,"[[16]](#footnote-16) a book (the Torah) to read, and a house to live in. In other words, it is the civilized, human effort that enables man's dignified existence (a "book" is also one of the necessities of man's existence) which constitutes a labor that is forbidden on Shabbat.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The fifth group, as mentioned, includes general labors: igniting a fire and extinguishing it are necessary for many technical human actions; striking the final hammer blow is the final act in creating a product by way of the previously listed actions;[[18]](#footnote-18) and carrying from one domain to another is the basis for human economic life – for the existence of a market, to which a person takes his product to the public domain in order to sell it and from which he buys what he needs for his maintenance.

In order to compile this list of labors, it was only necessary to contemplate the circumstances of human life and classify all the efforts one must dedicate to ensure his existence into a few basic areas of which this existence is made up.[[19]](#footnote-19)

What is the connection between the list of labors enumerated in our *Mishna*, according to this explanation, and the labors that were performed in the *Mishkan*?[[20]](#footnote-20)

**V. The shared reason for the *melakhot* that are prohibited on Shabbat and the command to build the *Mishkan***

At the end of his *Biur* to the book of *Shemot*, Moshe Mendelssohn wrote a short, original essay on the reason for the grand, detailed command about the building of the *Mishkan.* Nechama Leibowitz cited most of what he had to say in her study on *Parashot Vayakhel-Pekudei*, "The Recapitulations." I will quote a portion of his comments:

The *Biur* (Mendelssohn) adopts a somewhat different approach:

When the Almighty chose His people, He foresaw, in His wisdom, that they would require all kinds of skills in the pursuit of their common life together in their own land. These skills may be divided into the following categories: (1) essential skills, without which one cannot attain happiness, such as those required to procure food, clothing, and housing; (2) useful skills required for the maintenance of the roadways and bridges, and for the production of articles of daily use in metal and other materials; (3) artistic skills that introduce pleasure into human life and ornament it, such as those involved in embroidery, art, sculpture, etc. All these employments are to the credit and advantage of the nation, so long as they do not exceed the bounds of discretion and do not border on extravagance. Over-indulgence in the above fields is detrimental, particularly in the case of artistic skills – which can destroy the state, since they lead to the pursuit of pleasure, effete living, envy and strife, and ultimate anarchy. It is possible that just as God commanded His people to dedicate the first fruits of their persons, soil, and cattle to Him (cf. the dictum of our Sages: "There exists nothing, the first fruits of which are not dedicated to Heaven"[[21]](#footnote-21)), so He desired that they offer to Him the first fruits of their thoughts and abilities and dedicate them to His service in the form of the *Mishkan*, with its appurtenances and vestments. This would be instrumental in sanctifying all their affairs, since they would remember the Lord in all their deeds and would not go astray in pursuit of luxury and vanity. "For a skill which was not employed in the *Mishkan* cannot be accounted a skill,"[[22]](#footnote-22) and it is not right for a God-fearing Jew to occupy himself with such. (From Nechama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot*," pp. 649-650, with minor edits for punctuation and style)

Nechama Leibowitz summarizes his position, and her concluding words are worth repeating:

The instructions to build the *Mishkan*, to work in wood, metal, gold, and silver, may be compared to the ordinances of the first fruits and firstborn, through which the worshipper dedicates his goods to the Almighty in acknowledgement of his Creator's bounty. In this case, it is not the products of man's work and skills that are dedicated, but the most precious of his endowments, his skill and mental capacities. Before the Israelites settled down in their homeland, before they managed to build their own house and vineyard, they were called upon to dedicate their skills and abilities to God, that the first fruits of their work should be for the sake of Heaven. (*Studies in Shemot*," pp. 650-651, with minor edits for punctuation and style)

Let us accept Mendelssohn’s interpretation for the construction of the *Mishkan* but turn it in a different direction. His explanation is correct that the construction of the *Mishkan* embodies all of the civilized, human activity of Israel, and directs it to Heaven, but I see a different reason for this.

In my *shiur* on [*Parashat Teruma*](https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-shemot/parashat-teruma/teruma-ark-covenant) (first series; sections I and V of that study), I noted the fact that the *Mishkan* expresses the covenant between God and Israel that was entered into at Mount Sinai and is also an instrument for the continuation and completion of that covenant, as God meets with Moshe to complete the giving of the Torah to Israel.

A covenant is a mutual commitment between two parties; by its very nature, it involves action by both parties entering into it. This is also the case in a covenant between God and man. How do the actions of the two parties entering into the covenant, Israel and God, find expression in the *Mishkan*?

The human side in this covenant, in relation to the *Mishkan* as representing the covenant, lies in the human effort involved in the very building of the *Mishkan.* The people of Israel, who wholly devote themselves to the building of the *Mishkan* and dedicate all of their wisdom and creative talents to the project, express thereby their desire to establish God's *Shekhina* among them, "that He may have a house in their midst consecrated to His name, where He will speak with Moshe and command the people of Israel" (Ramban, beginning of *Parashat Teruma*). God's promises, "and I will dwell among them" (*Shemot* 25:8), and, "and there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you" (25:22), when fulfilled, complete the human act through the realization of the *Mishkan*’s purpose – the presence of God in their midst and the resting of the *Shekhina* in the work of their hands.

We will now return to the question of the source of *Chazal*’sposition regarding the overlap between the labors performed in the *Mishkan* and the labors that are prohibited on Shabbat. According to the reason proposed in this section for the commandment to build the *Mishkan*, it may be suggested that this overlap stems from the reason common to both: both the building of the *Mishkan* and the abstention from work on Shabbat relate to man's cultural-productive activity: that which is prohibited on Shabbat because it is "creative work" (*melekhet machshevet*) for a person's existential needs is that which he must do for Heaven in the building of the *Mishkan.* Thus, it would be possible to reverse what is stated in the Gemara and say that the labors performed in the *Mishkan* are learned from the labors that are prohibited on Shabbat. However, since most of the labors performed in the *Mishkan* are described in the Torah, both in the command to build the *Mishkan* and in the account of the execution of this command, whereas the labors prohibited on Shabbat are mostly not spelled out, and they are "as mountains hanging on a hair" (*Chagiga* 1:8), the Sages invoke the rule that the obscure is clarified by the explicit, since they share the same reason.

Why, then, does the building of the *Mishkan* not set aside Shabbat? It seems that this itself is the reason – that the building of the *Mishkan* includes all of man's *human activity***,** which he dedicates to Heaven, whereas on Shabbat we are commanded to abstain from that human activity.

It is true that in the building of the *Mishkan*,this human activity is dedicated to God rather than to the needs of man, but ultimately it is an activity of the six days of work that man dedicates to God, whereas the holiness of Shabbat is fixed and permanent, and it precedes in time and in importance all holiness that is the fruit of human action. Shabbat is therefore not a time for that human activity – not in a person's private life, and thus also not when he elevates that weekday activity to be holy to God.[[23]](#footnote-23)

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. The Torah also indicates explicitly that the action of the wood gatherer [*mekoshesh eitzim*]is a labor that is prohibited on Shabbat, and it is in regard to this that the Torah states the punishment for desecrating Shabbat through performance of forbidden work (*Bamidbar* 15:32-36).

In the section dealing with the manna, Moshe says to Israel: "Tomorrow is a solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord. Bake that which you will bake, and cook that which you will cook, and all that remains over, lay up for you to be kept until the morning" (*Shemot* 16:23). Onkelos translates: "That which you will bake in the future, bake, and that which you will cook in the future, cook," and correspondingly, Rashi explains: "Whatever you wish to bake in the oven, bake today all that you will need for two days; and what you require to cook of it in water, cook today." All this implies another labor, or two, prohibited on Shabbat, namely, the prohibitions of baking and cooking. However, the Ibn Ezra writes in his long commentary to *Shemot* 16:23: "'That which you would bake' ordinarily, 'bake' for your use today… from the one *omer* they would do all this [=the daily *omer*], and cook it all as you wish, and eat what satisfies you. 'And all that remains' [=the second *omer*] – leave it until the morning, when I will tell you what to do with it." The Ramban concludes from his words: "If so, they ate the manna on Shabbat raw, without baking it, or boiling it in pots and making cakes of it, as it was their custom to do." According to this interpretation, one cannot conclude from these verses that baking and cooking are prohibited on Shabbat, for verse 23 speaks of baking and cooking the manna of Friday, as they would ordinarily do on a daily basis, and says nothing about the way to eat manna on Shabbat. (The Ramban’s statement that "if so, they ate the manna on Shabbat raw" is not based on what is stated in these verses, but on his knowledge that baking and cooking are prohibited on Shabbat.) The Ramban concludes his commentary to verse 23 with the words: "The first [=Rashi's explanation] is more correct, and this is also the opinion of Onkelos." [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. His two colleagues are Rabbi Yonatan ben Akhinai and Rabbi Yonatan ben Elazar (*Shabbat* 49a, bottom). A similar discussion is found in the Jerusalem Talmud (*Shabbat* 7:2, 9c), but there we find no opinion similar to that of Rabbi Chanina bar Chama. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Rashi: "They sowed and reaped the plants from which they derived dyes to dye wool blue and rams' skins, and they also ground and kneaded the plants from which they derived dyes to dye. The baking that is mentioned in the *mishna* that enumerates the principal categories of labor is the cooking of the plants from which they derived the dyes." See also the following note. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The *baraita* implies that even the dismantling and reassembly of the *Mishkan* is included in “the building of the *Mishkan*.” If we also include in the work of the *Mishkan* the sacrifices that were offered in it, there is no need to rely on Rashi’s forced explanation, cited in the previous note: Sowing, reaping, and baking were all part of the preparation of the showbread and the various meal-offerings. The words of Rashi, however, are based on the Gemara in *Shabbat* 74b. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In *Shabbat* 74b, the Gemara asks about the labor of tying: "Where was there tying in the *Mishkan*?" and asks a similar question about the labor of untying. Later, it also asks about the labor of tearing for the purpose of sewing: "Was there tearing in the *Mishkan*?"

The truth is that the Mishna already derives the labors that are prohibited on Shabbat from the labors that were performed in the *Mishkan*: the first *mishna* in chapter *Ha-Zorek* (chap. 11) learns the law regarding one who reaches over or throws an article from one balcony to another, both of them in the public domain, from the service of the Levites: "For thus was the service of the Levites: Two wagons stood behind each other in the public domain, and they reached over the boards from one to another, but did not throw." [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Shabbat* 96b: "Why is one called a principal category of labor and the other a derivative category?" See *Tosafot* ad loc., s.v. *u-le-Rabbi Eliezer*, for different readings of the Gemara's answer and a different explanation for each reading. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In *Shabbat* 73b, the Gemara asks: "But winnowing, selecting, and sifting are identical [Rashi: 'They are all the same labor – separating the food from the waste']? Abaye and Rava both said: Whatever was performed in the *Mishkan*, even if there are [labors] similar to it, is counted separately." [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This study was published in my book, *Iyunim be-Farashot ha-Shavu'a*, 1st series, but in the Virtual Beit Midrash, it appeared in the 2nd series in 5762. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See note 2 in that study. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A broad proof of this argument can be found in section 1 of my *shiur* on [*Parashat Ki-Tisa*](https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-shemot/parashat-ki-tisa/ki-tisa-shabbat-and-mishkan), 1st series. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In my study of [*Parashat Emor*](https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-vayikra/parashat-emor/emor-parasha-festivals-its-structure-and-significance), 2nd series, which discusses the structure of the Biblical passage dealing with the festivals in *Vayikra* 23, I noted in section 4, in the wake of the Ramban there, the great similarity between the opening of Moshe's command regarding the building of the *Mishkan* with the mitzvaof Shabbat and the opening of the passage about the festivals with the mitzvaof Shabbat: In both places, after the mitzvaof Shabbat, there is a second opening of the command, which testifies to the inclusion of the mitzvaof Shabbat in a kind of parentheses, and according to the Ramban's interpretation there, for a similar purpose. See pp. 109-112 of that study. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. a. It is possible that, according to Rashi, the juxtaposition of the mitzvaof Shabbat to the commandment to build the *Mishkan* was expounded by Rabbi Chanina bar Chama in an original manner, not based on the words of the *Mekhilta* and of the commentators that we cited in section II. But then we would have to ask where Rabbi Chanina finds a source for the law that the time for building the *Mishkan* is "on a weekday, and not on Shabbat."

b. It is also possible that Rabbi Chanina understood the juxtaposition of the sections as did the *Mekhilta*, but since we do not know what is defined as a labor that is prohibited on Shabbat, we limit the prohibited labors to what we know for certain, and all that is certain is that the actions performed in the building of the *Mishkan* are prohibited on Shabbat. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. These are spelled out in the *mishna*: "Sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, selecting, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking." [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. "Shearing wool, bleaching, hackling, dyeing, spinning, stretching the threads, the making of two meshes, weaving two threads, dividing two threads, tying and untying, sewing two stiches, tearing in order to sew two stitches." [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. "Capturing a deer, slaughtering it, salting it, curing its hide, scraping it of its hair, cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters [over the erasure]." [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. These are the two fundamental needs mentioned by Yaakov in his vow (*Bereishit* 28:20): "If God will be with me… and will give me bread to eat, and a garment to wear." [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Of course, there are additional conditions for defining an action as a labor for the performance of which on Shabbat one is liable, e.g., that it be a *melekhet machshevet* – intentional and constructive. However, I wish to understand the cultural context from which the list of labors emerged. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Perhaps these last three labors – extinguishing, kindling, and striking a final hammer blow – constitute a group in itself, of labors that are characteristic of the metalsmiths, the blacksmith and the goldsmith. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. In an article by Rabbi Dr. Yechiel Michel Gutman in *Ha-Tzofeh le-Chokhmat Yisrael*, 5681, "*Ha-Avoda be-Shabbat le-fi ha-Halakha*" (citations from which are brought by Rabbi Y. Jacobson, in his *Bina ba-Mikra,* on *Parashat Vayakhel*), the author classifies the labors in a manner slightly different from mine, but he reaches a similar conclusion: Regarding the labors of "working the land" (the first seven labors in the *mishna*), he writes: "It is clear that the number of these labors was not determined in the *beit midrash*, for every farmer is familiar with and proficient in them, and there is no doubt that the Sages of the Talmud themselves were familiar with these labors from their own experience, and did not need any exposition." Regarding the labors of "food preparation" (the next four labors in the *mishna*), he writes: "The labors relating to food preparation were also taken from everyday actions, and there was no need for any exposition. Grinding, sifting, kneading, and baking could be seen in every home." After he finishes his survey of all the labors, he writes: "What emerges from all that has been said is that the 39 labors are not the result of theoretical speculation, but rather real labors, limited by the state of the various arts and crafts in those days." [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. In *Shabbat* 74b, Rav Pappa notes that the order of our *mishna*, which enumerates the principal categories of labor that are prohibited on Shabbat, is based not on the order of the labors in the *Mishkan*, but on the principle presented in this section. His words relate to the labor of baking: "Rav Pappa said: Our *Tanna* omits the boiling of ingredients [for dyes], which took place in the *Mishkan*, and treats of baking!" Baking and cooking are the same labor performed on different objects, and Rav Pappa is puzzled by the fact that the *Tanna* defines the labor as "baking" bread, whereas in the *Mishkan*, it was actually "cooking" the ingredients for dyes. This is his answer: "Our *Tanna* takes the order of [making] bread." That is to say, the *Tanna* of our *mishna* listed the 11 labors connected to the making of bread, and baking is the last of that series of labors. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. I did not find a source for this statement. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Based on the words of the Gemara in *Shabbat* 96b, but with a different meaning. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. I wrote something similar at the end of my study of [*Parashat Ki-Tisa*](https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-shemot/parashat-teruma/teruma-ark-covenant), 1st series, only that the formulation there accords with the focus of the discussion in that study. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)