YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**student summaries of *Sichot* of the Roshei Yeshiva**

***Parashot Vayakhel-pekudei***

***Sicha* of HarAV Baruch Gigi**

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Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Leon Brum for the *Refua Sheleima* of

Dana Petrover (Batsheva bat Gittel Aidel Leba)

and Marvin Rosenberg (Meir Chaim ben Tzipporah Miriam)

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In memory of six friends and family,
strong pillars of the Montreal Jewish community,
who have left us in the past seven years.
All were אוהבי עם ישראל, אוהבי ארץ ישראל, אוהבי תורת ישראל.

Joseph (Yosie) Deitcher

Avrum (Avy) Drazin

Rabbi Joseph Drazin

Leibel Frisch

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**“Six Days Shall Work Be Done”**

Adapted by Aviad Brestel

Translated by David Strauss

Many times throughout the Torah, the issue of Shabbat is addressed. One of the most prominent passages on the subject appears at the beginning of our *parasha*:

And Moshe assembled all the Israelite congregation and said to them: These are the words which the Lord has commanded, that you should do them.

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; whosoever does any work therein shall be put to death. (*Shemot* 35:1-2)

As is well known, the Written Law does not specify the labors that are prohibited on Shabbat, to the point that the Mishna in *Chagiga* (1:8) states:

The laws of the sabbath, the festival offerings and misappropriation are as mountains hanging by a hair, as they have many laws but little text.

While Shabbat is mentioned many times, the specific types of forbidden labor remain obscure. Thus, it is surprising that one prohibited labor is explicitly mentioned in the next verse in this passage:

You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day. (*Shemot* 35:3).

*Chazal* already sense the difficulty, famously disagreeing (BT *Shabbat* 70a cites these views in the names of Rabbi Yosei and Rabbi Natan respectively), as to whether the prohibition of kindling fire on Shabbat is singled out in order to indicate that its transgression is a corporal (rather than capital) offense (*lav*), or whether it is singled out in order to indicate that each transgression of Shabbat law requires a separate act of atonement. That is to say, is the prohibition of kindling on Shabbat of lesser severity than the 38 other forbidden labors? Or is it mentioned only to teach us that one incurs liability for each and every forbidden labor, and we do not judge multiple types of forbidden labor committed together as a single act of Shabbat violation?

The Ramban (ad loc., v. 3) suggests that the novelty here is the prohibition of labors relating to food preparation (*okhel nefesh*):

"You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day" — the objective of this verse is certainly to forbid on Shabbat even labors relating to food preparation…

It was necessary to say this… because mention was made of labor without specification, and it might have been possible to exclude labors relating to food preparation, for thus it is stated regarding Pesach: "You shall do no work therein" (*Devarim* 16:8), and labors relating to food preparation are excluded. Therefore it is mentioned here explicitly that even labors relating to food preparation are forbidden.

The Ramban infers from careful reading of the text that the Torah does not forbid all types of labor, but merely states: "Whoever does any work therein shall be put to death." The prohibition of kindling comes to include among the prohibitions of Shabbat even the labors relating to food preparation, which are permitted on the holy days of festivals.

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I wish to propose another way to understand the uniqueness of making fire.

To this end, let us preface by saying that in the *mishna* in Tractate *Shabbat* (7:2) that lists the forbidden labors, it is clearly evident that the various labors are divided into different groups, e.g., labors connected to the baking of bread, labors connected to weaving garments, and labors connected to the production of leather and writing. Afterwards, we find labors relating to building.

Four labors close the list: extinguishing a fire, kindling a fire, striking the final hammer blow, and transporting from one domain to another.

It may be suggested that these four labors are connected to a panoramic view of all human involvement in nature and the world. Let us work our way back from the last of them.

The labor of transporting is not directly connected to production, and it is therefore defined as a “lesser labor” (Tosafot, *Shabbat* 2a, s.v. *Yetziot, Pashat*), but nevertheless it is exceedingly important and central. The labor of transporting is what enables commerce and trade to flourish (see *Yirmeyahu* 17; Ramban, *Vayikra* 23:24).

Striking the final hammer blow means applying the finishing touches to a creative process; we may say that it is the pinnacle of production and its symbolization. See, for example, the Rambam's definition of this labor (*Hilkhot Shabbat* 23:7) as "the work of craftsmen."

Before these two culminative labors, we have another pair of labors: extinguishing a fire and kindling a fire. Having seen that all the other forbidden labors are connected to production, it is clear that this is also the reason for the prohibitions relating to fire. The explanation is simple: fire is the force behind all industry and technology.

It is clear, therefore, why it is specifically kindling fire that is mentioned in the Torah: it is the basis of all the industry that is forbidden on Shabbat.

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The Midrash describes the beginning of the use of fire as follows:

When the sun set at the termination of Shabbat, darkness began to set in and Adam was terrified. As it is stated: "And if I say: Surely the darkness shall envelop me (*yeshufeini*), and the night shall be light about me" (*Tehillim* 139:11). Shall [the serpent] about whom it is written: "He shall bruise (*yeshufekha*) your head, and you shall bruise (*teshufenu*)his heel" (*Bereishit* 3:15), now come to attack me?

What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He made him find two flints which he struck against each other and produced fire, over which he uttered a blessing.

This is what is stated: "And the night shall be light about me." (*Bereishit Rabba* (Vilna) *Bereishit* 11)

Let us note two points:

1. God makes Adam find the two flints, that is to say, He wants man to use fire.
2. God makes him find not actual fire, but flints, which implies that He wants man's active involvement.

In other words, God is pleased with the fire given to man and He wants him to be active.[[1]](#footnote-1) We find this not only in connection with fire, but in other areas relating to production, e.g., in the command to work the land.

The Lord God took the man, and He left him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to keep it. (*Bereishit* 2:15)

If so, a difficulty arises: why is something that is viewed so positively, production, completely banned on Shabbat?

The answer to this questions seems to be related to the need for balance: it is true that man must act, create, and innovate, but boundaries must be placed on his activity. As the Midrash states:

At the time when the Holy One, blessed be He, created the first man, He brought him among all the trees of the Garden of Eden.

He said to him: See My works, how pleasant and praiseworthy they are. Set your mind not to spoil and destroy My world; for if you spoil it, there is no one to repair it after you. (*Kohelet Rabba* 7:13)

Man's activity is required, but alongside it there must also be conservation and maintenance of an ecological balance.

Moreover, the restriction on human creativity does not only limit it and allow a person to recognize one’s place as God's partner and not as an independent creator; it also pours positive content into the development of the world, and introduces into it the Divine imperative, transforming seemingly mundane activity into Divine service.

Even today, we see how the world is progressing and developing at tremendous speed, but this leads to ecological damage and the like. The Torah demands of us ecological sustainability, which finds expression in cessation from work.

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Holiness, God's presence, is what limits human activity and prevents it from getting out of control: holiness in time, like Shabbat; and in space, like the Tabernacle and the Temple. This is the meaning of Shabbat and its prohibitions in general, and the prohibition of kindling fire in particular.

However, the same holiness, the presence of God, needs human action: the people of Israel sanctify time. What is more, the determination and sanctification of the new month depends exclusively on the Jewish court, the *beit din*.

“These are the appointed seasons of the Lord, even holy convocations, which you shall proclaim in their appointed season” (*Vayikra* 23:4) — you [fix the festivals] even if you err inadvertently; you, even if you err deliberately; you, even if you are misled. (BT *Rosh Hashana* 25a)

The same is true about the Temple:

"She is Zion, there is none that inquires after her” (*Yirmeyahu* 30:17) — from this we gather that she ought to be inquired after. (ibid. 30a)

This partnership is possible as long as man clears space and time for the recognition that joins heaven and earth, for partnership in production and development. It is precisely cessation from production that gives space for contemplation about man's place in God's world. This is the essence of the *mitzva* to "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (*Shemot* 20:7). Man makes room for the sanctity of time to be present in the world. As the Ramban says (ad loc. v. 8):

We must mention that it is holy in our eyes, as it is stated: "And call the sabbath a delight, and the holy of the Lord honorable" (*Yeshayahu* 58:13). What this means is that the cessation of work should be in our eyes because it is a holy day, to turn away from the affairs of our thoughts and the vanities of time, and to delight our souls in the ways of God, and to go to our sages and prophets to hear the word of God.

Humanity's readiness to acknowledge the limitations of production, to understand its mission, to find the balance and boundaries, is the meaning of introducing the foundations of holiness into the human sphere.

Shabbat (the foundation of the sanctity of time) and the Temple (the foundation of the sanctity of space) provide humanity with stability, in understanding the boundaries of its place, the boundaries of both activity and passivity.

This is the meaning of the command: "You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day." The Torah outlines the boundaries of human activity, and these boundaries give mankind a sense of serenity and freedom, so that it may not enslave itself entirely to infinite striving for control. Whoever seeks to control without constraint will eventually be controlled. It is precisely rest and relaxation that bestows boundless heritage, the legacy of Israel’s holy Shabbat.

He that delights in Shabbat is given an unbounded inheritance. (BT *Shabbat* 118a)

[This *sicha* was delivered on *Shabbat* *Parashat Vayakhel-Pekudei* 5778 (2018).]

1. This stands in contrast to Greek mythology, according to which Prometheus steals fire from the gods, against their will, of course. The issue is whether man struggles with God over control of the world or joins his Creator and becomes a partner in creation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)