

The Florence Melton Adult Mini-School
Section: Rhythms
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Topic: Shabbat and its Observance

Key Ideas: Last week we examined the scriptural basis for the “message” of Shabbat. Today we will trace the evolution of the biblical texts concerning Shabbat, and the concepts of “work” and “rest” in the prescriptions and proscriptions found in rabbinic literature and interpretative commentaries from various eras. We will define and examine the rabbinic concept of *melakhah* (“creative activity”) which prohibit certain activities and discuss the numerous “fences around the Torah” that the Sages mandated—activities which, in and of themselves, do not constitute *melakhah* but which might lead to it. We will follow the codification of the laws of Shabbat by Maimonides. Finally, we will examine some alternative models for Shabbat observance that attempt to redefine the parameters of permissible Shabbat activities by emphasizing spiritual and psychological dimensions of “work” and “rest.”

Our discussions of the texts:

Text 1: Exodus 35 1-5, 11, 29. The biblical prohibition against *melakhah*

Texts 2 & 3: Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 49b and Mishnah, Shabbat 7:1.

Melakhah represents a distinct category of creative activity derived from the various types of labor associated with the construction of the Sanctuary. The defining characteristic of *melakhah* is creative activity, not the physical exertion customarily associated with “work” in the conventional sense.

Song: Shlock Rock, *The Melachot*, from the Woodshlock CD.

Text 4: Isaiah. The positive commandments of Shabbat, honoring Shabbat and making it a “delight”

Text 5: Rambam (Maimonides), Mishneh Torah, Laws of Shabbat. Preparing to honor the Shabbat. Maintaining the spirit of Shabbat in spirit and action. Why candle lighting?

Text 6: Rambam (Maimonides), Mishneh Torah, Laws of Shabbat. Sanctifying Shabbat through words.

Text 7: Dayan Isadore Grunfeld, “Eloquent Restraint.” Abstaining from *melakhah*.

Text 8: Rebecca Alpert and Jacob Staub, “The Spirituality of Shabbat.”

Text 9: Mark Dov Shapiro, “Three Jews- Three Models for Work and Rest on Shabbat.” The walker, the museum-goer and the painter.