

Parashat Vayakhel Shabbat Guides for the Meticulous Woman

Entering a State of Being Rather than Doing on Shabbat

I'm sitting here again glued to my computer looking forward to Shabbat. Every night, it takes so much self-discipline to go to sleep, as there is always another email to write, a contact to update, a file to save, a photo to file and a sentence to complete before turning off the computer. If it wasn't for Shabbat, I don't know when I would ever read a real book, where you turn actual white pages with black letters and inhale the slightly distinct scent of each particular book. It seems like our lives are becoming gradually more and more electronic. When did we last have a weekday conversation with anyone without an interruption by a message ping on the smart phone? Social media messaging, somehow, succeed to trap us in its network. The more my time goes into I-phone, You-tube, Facebook, and Google Groups, the more I treasure my social-media free Shabbat. During nine months of the year on Shabbat, you will find me on my lounge chair, soaking up the light of the Torah in the sun. When the cold winter winds keep me indoors, I make do with the dining room couch. The Torah obviously anticipated our virtual age when prohibiting *מְלָאכָה/melacha* – creative work, rather than just mere *עֲבוּדָה/avodah* – work, on Shabbat. It is not physical toil that we must refrain from on Shabbat, but rather actions that cause a change in reality, and even in the virtual reality. Therefore, we dedicate one day a week on Shabbat where we abstain from creative work in order to remind ourselves that only Hashem is the ultimate Creator. Although sending an SMS or email takes no physical labor, one such message can completely change a person's life and thus effect all of reality. Therefore, we welcome a virtual and electronic device free Shabbat – the day when we rest from creative work and enter the state of being rather than doing.

Must We Abstain from Maintaining Order in Our Home on Shabbat?

Parashat Vayakhel opens with the command to keep Shabbat and the prohibition to engage in creative work and the subsequent punishment for desecrating the Shabbat:

ספר שמות פרק לה (ב) שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יְהִי לָכֶם קִדְּשׁ שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן לַיהוָה כֹּל הָעֹשֶׂה בוֹ מְלָאכָה יוּמָת: (ג) לֹא תִבְעֲרוּ אֵשׁ בְּכֹל מִשְׁבְּתֵיכֶם בַּיּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת:

“Six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy Shabbat of complete rest – a Shabbat to Hashem. Whoever does any creative work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire throughout your settlements on the Shabbat day” (*Shemot* 35:2).

The juxtaposition between the obligation to keep Shabbat and the building of the Tabernacle teaches us that the works we must abstain from on Shabbat are those needed for building the Tabernacle (*Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat* 49b). The ultimate creative work is the work of building the home for Hashem that changes all reality, returning world peace and prophecy to Israel. It should be noted that the creative works prohibited on Shabbat relate to only the building of the Tabernacle/Temple and not to maintaining the order of the sacrifices that continued daily after it was built. Perhaps we can draw the following parallel: while we may not engage in building a house on Shabbat, certain acts for the sake of maintaining order in the home on Shabbat are permitted.

Don't Use the Holy Shabbat to Prepare for the Week

The Jewish home is compared to a miniature Temple. To what degree are we permitted to maintain the order and cleanliness of our home during the Shabbat? Much is written about what we can't do on Shabbat. I'd like to share with you what you can do on Shabbat to keep your home nice and neat in honor of Shabbat even when you host many Shabbat guests, including children. The general rule is that we may not use the holy Shabbat day to prepare for the week. This would take us out of the state of 'being' required on the Shabbat.

Therefore, in general, we are not supposed to do anything on Shabbat that is not necessary for Shabbat itself, such as cleaning dishes that are not necessary for the subsequent Shabbat meals. So what can we do to keep our home together on Shabbat itself, when dishes pile up, crumbs are all over the floor and the ants are feasting? Moreover, for some of us who are meticulous about keeping our homes clean and neat, a pile of dirty dishes and a messy table disturbs our Shabbat peace.

Do Our Dishes have to Pile up on Shabbat?

Rabbi Nouwirth understood us, organized, orderly women well. He ruled that we may remove dishes from the table following the third Shabbat meal in order for the room to look neat and orderly, since this is not considered a necessity of *Motzei* Shabbat; if we desire that the room looks organized on Shabbat itself (*Sefer Shemirat Shabbat Ke'Hilchata*, Chapter 19). In regards to doing dishes, Hagaon Harav Waldenberg *zt"l* explains that since the reason for the prohibition of washing dishes on Shabbat is to prevent preparing for the days following Shabbat, therefore, washing dishes for the sake of Shabbat itself is permitted. If we want dishes to be clean on Shabbat for hygienic purposes, it is permissible to wash dishes in a hospital even on Shabbat (*Responsa Tzitz Eliezer* 14:37). Similarly, Hagaon Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt"l* writes that we may wash soiled dishes on Shabbat if we are unable to handle a mess, have ants in the home that are attracted to the leftover food, or are worried that guests will arrive and find the house looking unorganized. None of these reasons are considered preparing for after Shabbat, but rather, for the sake of Shabbat itself (*Sefer Shulchan Shlomo*, Chapter 323). (Maran Shlit"l quotes all of this in his *Sefer Chazon Ovadia*). In addition, you never know how many dishes you might need on Shabbat for unexpected guests. That's probably why there is a halachic opinion that we may wash even twenty bowls on Shabbat, even if we only need one of them (*Sefer Minhagei Ha'Maharash*, end of Chapter 394).

So now, after each Shabbat meal, I feel guilt-free when I wash all my dishes as long as I use only cold water and a non-absorbent dish-brush rather than a sponge. Since using a sponge or a washcloth invariably involves squeezing them to the point, where water is expelled it transgresses the prohibition against pressing (out liquid) on Shabbat (*Sefer Shemirat Shabbat Ke'Hilchata*, Part 1, Chapter 12:15).

Do our Tablecloths Need to Remain Filthy on Shabbat?

How may I then clean our tablecloth on Shabbat? Since there is no permitted way to clean wine and oil stains etc. from any absorbent cloth material on Shabbat and it would disturb my Shabbat peace to discover such stains, I use a transparent plastic non-absorbent tablecloth covering on Shabbat. To clean a plastic tablecloth or oilcloth on Shabbat follow these three steps:



1. Take a hand squeegee and collect all the crumbs, wiping them into the chicken food or compost bin.
2. Use a dish-brush with adequate liquid soap to clean away all spots.
3. Dry the tablecloth from soap residue and moisture with a dry rag or napkin.



Part of these steps may be used to clean anything that spilled anywhere on Shabbat, like on the countertop or floor. If a lot of liquid like grape-juice or wine spilled on the table, simply use the hand squeegee to collect all the liquid into a bowl. Use last year's dish-brush as a floor-brush to scrub ugly stains clean from the marble floor and then wipe the liquid with a dry cloth.

Folding Laundry on Shabbat

Can you imagine the following scenario? You are rushing to finish all your chores in time for Shabbat, when your yeshiva-*bachur* son comes home Friday afternoon with three weeks' worth of laundry. You have just emptied the second batch from your dryer into the laundry basket before rushing to light the Shabbat candles. May you fold the laundry and put it away? This is allowed if the basket of unfolded laundry bothers your Shabbat peace and the clothes were mostly dry when Shabbat began (*Sefer Shemirat Shabbat Ke'Hilchata*, Part 1, Chapter 15:17). While you may not fold the kind of laundry that have clearly defined creases such as men's pants, it is allowed to fold laundry without creases such as underwear and T-shirts (*Sefer Shemirat Shabbat Ke'Hilchata*, Part 1, Chapter 15:46). Sorting clothes into piles is forbidden. Therefore, you need to put away each item of clothing piece by piece, as it comes to your hand. The same applies to putting dishes and silverware away from dishracks (*Sefer Shemirat Shabbat Ke'Hilchata*, Part 1, Chapter 3:79, 82).

Upside-Down Tablecloths

Sometimes, Friday night we host a nice group of students and enlarge our table, using a different tablecloth. After the meal, we minimize the table again for the next day intimate meal for just my husband and I, and we put back the regular tablecloth. Now what to do with the large tablecloth, which does have clearly defined creases? Do I need to scrunch up the tablecloth in some corner, waiting for *Motzei* Shabbat to fold it properly and put it away in the closet? While this may be the ruling of some Rabbis (*Chaye Adam* 44:24), others are lenient and allow folding these creases, since they are not present when the tablecloth is in use, (*Kaf HaChayim* 32, *Aruch HaShulchan* 302:12). I have a great patent for folding tablecloths on Shabbat that considers both opinions. I simply fold the tablecloth inversely so that its creases go inside out.

Making a Bed on Shabbat

If a bed stands in a room where there are people and it is improper for the bed to be disorganized, you may replace the linens and blankets on the bed even though you have no intention of sleeping in the bed on Shabbat (*Magen Avraham*, Chapter 302). The *Mishnah Berura* agrees. Based on this, it is certainly permissible to make a bed that already has linens on it on Shabbat in order to make it look presentable as long as you do it for cleanliness and order in honor of Shabbat (*Sefer Shemirat Shabbat Ke'Hilchata*, Part 1, Chapter 24:25).

The Unlimited Blessings of Taking Delight in Shabbat

These are a few tips for the neat-freaks among us, about how to keep our home together on Shabbat. However, if unfolded laundry and dirty dishes don't usually bother you during the week, then some of these leniencies may not apply to you. A good rule of thumb is, "when in doubt- leave it out," until you ask your Rabbi. Shabbat is a special gift for the Jewish people (*Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 10b*). No matter which housework you may do on Shabbat, don't overdo it! Allow yourself to appreciate this holy gift and enjoy the special Shabbat time to thoroughly rest and renew yourself spiritually, as the prophet proclaims:

"If you restrain your foot because of the Shabbat, from pursuing your business on my holy day; and call the Shabbat a delight, the holy day of Hashem honorable; and honor it, not doing your own ways, nor pursuing your own business, nor speaking of vain matters. Then you shall delight yourself in Hashem; and I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Ya'acov your father. For the mouth of Hashem has spoken it" (*Yesha'ahu 58:14 -15*).

"Whoever takes delight in Shabbat is given a heritage without limits and will be granted all his heart's desires" (*Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 118b*).