

Parsha Ponders

Vayakhel | Mar 21, 2025 | 21 Adar 5785

*Automatic labor*¹

ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה וביום השביעי יהיה לכם קדש שבת שבתון ליקוק כל-העשה בו מלאכה יומת: לא תבערו אש בכל משבתיכם ביום השבת

Six days work will be done, and on the seventh day it will be for you Holy, a sabbath of sabbaths for Hashem. Anyone who does creative activity on it will die. Do not ignite a fire in all of your dwelling places on the sabbath day²

There is an opinion that Moshe died on Shabbos. This proves difficult, for we are taught³ that Moshe wrote thirteen Torah scrolls on the day that he died. One is forbidden from writing on Shabbos, so how did he accomplish such a thing⁴? The common approach is he didn't write it himself. Instead, he used his powers of prophecy to command the spiritual forces to write the scrolls for him. His quill moved on its own and wrote the Torahs⁵. Therefore, there was no Shabbos prohibition⁶.

It would seem that this leniency must be true. We know that the assembly of the *Mishkan* does not override Shabbos. That's why this verse about Shabbos observance precedes the command to assemble the *Mishkan*⁷. At the same time, during the seven days of inauguration for the *Mishkan*, Moshe by himself assembled and disassembled the *Mishkan*⁸. At the time, Moshe was astounded at such a command. How could he lift the heavy *Mishkan* beams all by himself? Hashem responded that he was not to worry, but to just go through the motions. Hashem Himself would lift the beams, but Moshe would appear to be the one doing it⁹.

Since the *Mishkan* was assembled "by itself", this must be why it could be assembled seven days straight, including on Shabbos. This also could explain why the verse says that work "will be done" (passive) and not "perform work" (active). The verse is discussing the assembly of the *Mishkan*. Although, according to this explanation, why does the verse say only six days work may be done, when it should be permitted even on Shabbos?

We can explain according to the Yerushalmi¹⁰. Certain creative activities, while forbidden on Shabbos itself, are permitted to be set up in advance on Friday. Once set up, they continue on their own, even on Shabbos. This is permitted, and the prooftext is a verse similar to ours. The derivation simply moves the

¹ Based on Toras Moshe to Exodus 35:2,3

² Exodus *loc. cit.*

³ Midrash Tehillim 90:1; Devarim Rabbah 9:9

⁴ Rosh Pesachim 10:13

⁵ The Chasam Sofer cites this from the Achronim. In Teshuvos Chasam Sofer Orach Chaim § 197 he brings this possibility without citation. However, in Teshuvos Chasam Sofer 6:29 he cites it from the Shenei Luchos HaBris, but I couldn't locate it. Pardes Yosef to Deuteronomy Chapter 31 § 9 points out that although everyone quotes this from the Shelah HaKadosh, it isn't to be found in any of his writings.

What's interesting is the Chasam Sofer is fine with the other possibility that he physically wrote 13 Torah scrolls in one day, despite the amazing feat it would be to write even one in one day. Cf. Etz Yosef *ad. loc.* who says this had to have been a miracle, for who can write even one in one day?

⁶ This isn't so simple. See Pardes Yosef *loc. cit.* for those who disagree with this assertion. It's also not simple that such a *sefer Torah* would be valid

⁷ Rashi to v. 2

⁸ Toras Kohanim to Leviticus 8:33; Sifrei Bamidbar § 44, brought by Rashi to Numbers 7:1; Yerushalmi Yoma 1:1

⁹ Rashi to Exodus 39:33

¹⁰ Yerushalmi Shabbos 1:5

comma. Instead of “Six days you shall work and on Shabbos you shall rest”, it’s read as “Six days you shall work and on Shabbos. You shall rest”. Meaning, work can even be done on Shabbos, as long as it’s set up during the six other days of the week.

We can say similarly with our verse. Six days work “shall be done”, meaning the *Mishkan* shall be assembled “on its own”, but not only that, but “and on the seventh day”. It’s also permissible to assemble the *Mishkan* on Shabbos, since it’s happening on its own.

Our verse continues and says that anyone who does creative activity on Shabbos shall die, and it specifies not to ignite a fire on Shabbos. Why is this? One might have thought that not only the assembly of the *Mishkan* is permissible, but even the creation of the Menorah. Why? Rashi tells us¹¹ that Moshe couldn’t figure out how to create the Menorah. It was too difficult for him. Instead, he was told to take a block of gold and throw it into the fire. What emerged was the Menorah.

Since the Menorah was made on its own, one could think that even it can be made on Shabbos. Nevertheless, the Menorah is different. Yes, it was made on its own, but it involved Moshe’s participation. He had to at least throw the gold into the fire. This itself involved various creative labours which are prohibited. It caused the fire to ignite more, and it purified the metals in the gold. Therefore, the Torah stresses not to ignite a fire on Shabbos. This was to affirm that creating the Menorah on Shabbos is indeed prohibited.

Good Shabbos

¹¹ [Rashi to Exodus 25:40](#)