

Rabbi Ariel Mizrahi



Inspiring our Souls with the words of Torah

בס"ד

But immediately this raises a question. What does מלאכה (*melacha; creative transformation*) actually mean?

Because somehow flicking on a switch is forbidden, yet jogging or carrying a very heavy box of soda up the stairs is allowed.

Now you tell me which one is easier: walking forty-five minutes, or taking an Uber and pushing a little button on my phone. Which one is easier?

Somehow walking is allowed, but Uber is not allowed.

If you ask me, it is much easier to Uber. But somehow the תורה (*Torah; the Five Books of Moses*) says you are not allowed to Uber, yet you are allowed to walk for two hours if you need to go to someone's house in the hot sun.

So obviously we need to understand what מלאכה (*melacha; creative transformation*) really means.

The Hotel Elevator Story

Rabbi David Fohrman tells a very funny story.

He was once at a hotel on שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*). There was a שמחה (*simcha; joyous celebration*) going on there, a family event.

The father, or the grandfather, was in a wheelchair, and he could not go down the stairs.

Now the elevator was available, but the family was very, very פרום (*frum; strictly observant*). According to the opinions they followed regarding how elevators work on שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*), they would not use the elevator.

So what did they do?



Approaching שבת and the Questions It Raises

פרשת ויקהל (*Parashat Vayakbel; the Torah portion of Vayakbel*) discusses the laws of שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*), and there is a very famous פסוק (*pasuk; verse*) in this week's portion:

ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה (*shesbet yamim ta'aseh melacha; six days you shall perform creative work*).

The verse tells us that you shall work for six days, and on the seventh day it is holy, the seventh day is a day of rest.

And of course we know that this instruction appears right next to the commandment of building the משכן (*Mishkan; the Tabernacle*). From this juxtaposition we learn what exactly it means to work on שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*). The Torah tells us not to do מלאכה (*melacha; creative transformation*).



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How did they get their father from the bedrooms down to the ballroom where the meals were taking place?

They had four boys carrying their father in a wheelchair down the stairs.

You can imagine how heavy this must have been, how difficult the balance must have been. God forbid if they slipped.

And as they are heading down the stairs, carrying their father step by step, one of the hotel workers looks at them and says:

“Guys, there’s an elevator.”

They look at him and say, “Thank you sir, but we are not allowed to use the elevator.”

The worker looks confused.

“What do you mean you can’t use the elevator? It’s in service.”

And they explain to him, “No, no, we can’t use the elevator because it is our Sabbath. It is our day of rest.”

And the worker looks at them and says something very funny.

He says, “If this is what your day of rest looks like, I don’t want to know what your day of work looks like.”

And that really captures the problem.

What in the world is going on here?

How is carrying a wheelchair down the stairs allowed, while pushing a button in an elevator is forbidden?

Three Questions

About שבת

This leads us to three fundamental questions about שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*).

Question 1 — What is מלאכה?

What exactly is מלאכה (*melacha; creative transformation*)?

Because clearly the definition of work on שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) is not about how much physical effort something requires.

Carrying a wheelchair down a staircase is clearly exhausting.

Pressing a button on an elevator requires almost no effort.

Yet the Torah prohibits the button and allows the carrying.

So what exactly is מלאכה (*melacha; creative transformation*)?

Question 2 — Why Did God Rest?

The second question is very simple.

Why do we rest on שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*)?

We rest because הקדוש ברוך הוא (*HaKadosh Baruch Hu; the Holy One, Blessed be He*) rested.

שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) commemorates creation.

God created the world in six days, and then He rested.

But this raises an obvious question.



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The Rosa Parks Analogy

Why did God rest?

Was He tired?

Did He need a break?

Creating the universe might be difficult for me and you, but for **הוא הקדוש ברוך הוא** (*HaKadosh Baruch Hu; the Holy One, Blessed be He*), creation was as easy as speaking.

The **תורה** (*Torah; the Five Books of Moses*) tells us:

ויאמר אלקים (*vayomer Elokim; and God said*).

God spoke, and reality came into existence.

So if God was not tired, why did He stop?

Question 3 — Why Remember Creation Through Rest?

There is a third question that is even more fascinating.

Let's say we want to commemorate creation.

Fine.

God created the universe.

How should we remember that?

Creation lasted six days.

But how do we commemorate creation?

By copying what God did on the seventh day — resting.

Isn't that backwards?

If we want to remember creation, shouldn't we remember the act of creation itself?

Rabbi David Fohrman gives a wonderful analogy.

Imagine we want to commemorate Rosa Parks.

We want to honor her activism and her refusal to move to the back of the bus.

So we gather together and say:

“Okay everyone, we are going to create Rosa Parks Day in America. What should we do to commemorate this great moment?”

One person suggests:

“I have an idea. Everyone should ride buses all day.”

Why?

Because Rosa Parks rode a bus.

So we will ride buses too.

Everyone nods and says that sounds like a good idea.

Then someone else raises his hand and says:

“Wait a second. After she finished riding the bus, she went home and took a nap because she was tired.”

“So I think the best way to commemorate Rosa Parks Day is that we should all take a nap.”

She rested, so we should rest.

But that sounds ridiculous.

And yet, in a sense, that is exactly what we are doing with **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*).



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We are commemorating creation — which took six days of creative activity — by copying what happened on the seventh day: rest.

But that seems to miss the point.

If we really wanted to commemorate creation, then **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) should be the busiest day of the week.

If anything, we should be obligated to do as much work as possible in order to remember the work that God did.

The Real Meaning of Rest in Creation

So we have three big questions.

1. What exactly is **מלאכה** (*melacha; creative transformation*)?
2. Why did **השם** (*Hashem; God*) rest?
3. Why do we commemorate creation by resting instead of creating?

And the answer to all of these questions is something very surprising.

The rest of creation was not a pause after creation.

Rest was part of creation.

Rest was actually the final stage of creation.

The rest was the climax, the finale, the last step.

It was not something that came after creation.

It was the culmination of creation itself.

In fact, we say in **קידוש** (*Kiddush; the sanctification prayer recited on Shabbat*) that **שבת** (*Shabbat;*

Sabbath) is:

תכלית מעשה שמים וארץ (*tachlit ma'aseh shamayim va'aretz; the ultimate purpose of the creation of heaven and earth*).

What does **תכלית** (*tachlit; purpose or ultimate goal*) mean?

It means the goal.

It means the final objective.

שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) is the purpose of creation.

Creation did not happen, and then **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) came afterward.

No.

The final step of creation — the purpose of creation — was **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*).

The Difference Between מלאכה and עבודה

To understand this, we must understand what **מלאכה** (*melacha; creative transformation*) actually means.

The verse says:

ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה (*shesbet yamim ta'aseh melacha; six days you shall perform creative work*).

Usually we translate **מלאכה** (*melacha; creative transformation*) as “work.”

But that translation is not really accurate.

In Hebrew there are two words.



There is עבודה (*avodah; labor or physical exertion*).

And there is מלאכה (*melacha; creative transformation*).

They are not the same.

עבודה (*avodah; labor or exertion*) means working hard.

Carrying heavy boxes.

Dragging furniture.

Walking long distances.

That is עבודה (*avodah; labor*).

But שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) never says you are forbidden to do עבודה (*avodah; labor*).

The Torah says you are forbidden to do מלאכה (*melacha; creative transformation*).

And מלאכה (*melacha; creative transformation*) does not mean exertion.

מלאכה (*melacha; creative transformation*) means transforming the world.

It means taking the world and changing its state.

When God created the world, there was transformation taking place.

Land became agriculture.

Darkness became light.

Nothing became something.

Creation was transformation.

And that is what is forbidden on שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*).

Transforming vs Exerting

Think about plowing land.

You take a field and transform it into farmland.

That is מלאכה (*melacha; creative transformation*).

Lighting a fire transforms the physical world.

That is מלאכה (*melacha; creative transformation*).

But carrying a table from one place to another?

That may be exhausting.

But you did not transform the world.

You exerted energy, but you did not create.

That is עבודה (*avodah; labor*).

And שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) is not about exertion.

It is about transformation.

The Artist Who Must Stop

Now once we understand that מלאכה (*melacha; creative transformation*) means transformation, we can begin to understand what the rest of שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) really means.

The rest of שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) is not the rest of exhaustion.

It is the rest of completion.

The best example I can give you is an artist.

Imagine a painter working on a painting.



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Creation Requires Letting Go

Eventually there comes a moment when the painter puts down the brush and says:

“I’m done.”

What would happen if the painter never put down the brush?

What would happen if an editor never put down his pen?

What would happen if a sculptor never put down his chisel?

One of the hardest steps in creating something is stopping.

Stopping is part of creating.

Stopping is the moment when the artist says:

“It’s enough.”

There is always another brush stroke.

There is always another edit.

There is always another adjustment.

But it takes strength to step back and say:

“I’m done.”

And if the sculptor never stops chiseling, eventually there will be no sculpture left.

He will chisel and chisel and chisel until nothing remains.

The final step of creation is the ability to stop.

When someone creates something, the moment they stop working on it is the moment it becomes a creation.

As long as I am still editing it, it is still my project.

It is still an extension of me.

It is still my puppet.

But once I stop — once I step back — the creation gains its own identity.

It becomes independent.

It becomes something real.

And that is exactly what happened with creation.

הוא הקדוש ברוך הוא (*HaKadosh Baruch Hu; the Holy One, Blessed be He*) could have continued creating.

But instead He stopped.

The world was not perfect.

But God said:

“I’m done.”

And now the world continues.

Now humanity takes the next step.

Now we fulfill the command:

לעבדה ולשמרה (*le'ovdah u'leshomrah; to work it and to guard it*).

God Let Go of the World

When **הקדוש ברוך הוא** (*HaKadosh Baruch Hu; the Holy One, Blessed be He*) created the world, He could have kept going.

He could have continued transforming.

He could have continued perfecting.

But instead, **השם** (*Hashem; God*) stopped.

The world was not perfect, but God said: I am done.

And from this point forward, the world is now handed over to you.

Now it becomes your job.

Now it becomes humanity's responsibility to continue advancing the world.

This is exactly what the **תורה** (*Torah; the Five Books of Moses*) tells us when God placed **אדם** (*Adam; the first human*) in **גן עדן** (*Gan Eden; the Garden of Eden*):

לעבדה ולשמרה (*le'ovdah u'leshomrah; to work it and to guard it*).

God could have done everything Himself. He could have perfected the world far better than we ever could.

But instead He stopped.

And that stopping was not a weakness.

It was part of creation.

Because if God never stopped, then the world would forever remain His project.



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It would never become something independent.

Creation only becomes real when the creator lets go.

The Challenge of Letting Go

And this idea is not only about the creation of the world.

It is something we experience in life all the time.

One of the most difficult things in life is letting go.

For example, with our children.

There comes a point in life when parents must allow their children independence.

You want to keep them close.

You want to watch over them.

You want to monitor every decision.

But eventually you have to let go.

You have to say:

"I taught you what I could. I gave you what I could. Now it's time for you to go and live your life."

And it is only at that moment that you have truly created a child who is their own person.

Otherwise they are not really independent.

They are simply an extension of you.

Why Letting Go Is Necessary

Letting go is important for two reasons.

First, it is important for them.



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For the child, for the student, for the person you created.

Because they need their own identity.

But it is also important for the creator.

For you.

Because if you never let go, you will continue to treat that person as your project.

You will keep trying to fix them.

You will keep adjusting them.

You will keep molding them.

And that can become very dangerous.

When something is part of you, you feel like you can do whatever you want with it.

As a small example, think about how people talk about abortion.

The argument that is often made is that the baby is part of the mother.

And therefore the mother can do whatever she wants with it.

Because it is part of her.

It is hers.

But the moment the child is separate, the moment the child exists independently, then the world understands that it cannot be treated that way.

And that idea is a **משל** (*mashal; analogy*) for many relationships in life.

Sometimes people treat others as if they are extensions of themselves.

Even after those people have become independent.

When

Parents Don't Let Go

You see this sometimes with parents and their children.

Parents still see their children as extensions of themselves.

"It's my kid."

"I can do whatever I want."

And the **תורה** (*Torah; the Five Books of Moses*) is teaching us something very powerful.

Sometimes you must stop.

Sometimes you must take a step back.

Sometimes you must rest.

You must stop creating.

You must stop fixing.

And allow the person in front of you to exist as their own individual.

Walking Children Down the Aisle

Think about the moment when parents walk their children down the aisle at a wedding.

That moment is beautiful.

But it is also painful.

Because it represents letting go.



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You are giving your child independence.

You are saying:

“I raised you. I taught you. I guided you.”

“But now your life is your own.”

And that is not easy.

Parents naturally worry.

What decisions will they make?

Where will life take them?

What choices will they make?

But only when you let go do you create something new — a new family, a new independent life.

When Parents Interfere Too Much

Sometimes parents cannot let go.

And when that happens, they interfere.

They interfere in their children’s marriages.

They try to fix things.

They try to control situations.

They think they are helping.

But sometimes they end up destroying.

It is like the sculptor who keeps chiseling and chiseling and chiseling.

Eventually there is nothing left.

The sculpture disappears.

And **השם** (*Hashem; God*) is teaching us something through **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*).

Sometimes the hardest part of creating something is stopping.

Resting is hard work.

Resting is not easy.

The Seduction of Creation

Creating can be very powerful.

But creating can also be very seductive.

It can become addictive.

You begin building something, improving something, fixing something — and it becomes consuming.

You get pulled deeper and deeper into the process.

And if you wait for something to be perfect before you stop, you will never stop.

You will never rest.

The Lesson of שבת

That is why **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) teaches us such a powerful lesson.

It forces us to pause.

It forces us to stop transforming the world.

It forces us to step back and look at reality.

To recognize that we do not control everything.

To accept that we do not need to fix everything.



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To understand that not everything depends on us.

And sometimes we must simply let go.

The Endless Chase

Today especially, life is constant movement.

We are always chasing.

Chasing the next video.

Chasing the next deal.

Chasing the next car.

Chasing the next gadget.

Chasing the next piece of clothing.

Consumerism surrounds us.

There is always something new to buy.

Always somewhere new to go.

Always something more to achieve.

The world feels enormous.

And we keep chasing.

Even with the people around us.

We chase improvement.

We chase better.

We chase perfection.

But at a certain point, a person has to stop.

A person has to say:

“That’s it.”

And simply enjoy the people around them as they are

today.

From Transforming to Experiencing

So on **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) we stop transforming, and we begin experiencing.

That is what **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) is.

It is a day when we stop transforming the world.

We stop trying to improve everything.

We stop trying to fix everyone.

Instead, we begin experiencing life.

That is the meaning of **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*).

Resting is not about exhaustion.

Resting is about stepping back.

People often think that **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) is about sleeping.

But that is not really the idea.

If you enjoy sleeping, then fine — sleep.

But the point of **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) is not sleep.

In fact, sleeping too much means you are not experiencing the day.

שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) is the opposite.

It is the moment when we say:



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"I'm done."

I don't need to go to work.

I don't need to control everything.

I don't need to fix everything.

Life does not depend entirely on me.

Accepting the People in Our Lives

One of the deepest lessons of **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) is learning to accept the people around us.

Many times we are always trying to improve the people in our lives.

We see flaws.

We see imperfections.

We see things we wish we could change.

If we are honest, most of us could easily make a list.

Five things we want to change about our spouse.

Five things we want to change about our children.

Five things we want to change about our siblings.

Five things we want to change about our in-laws.

Five things we want to change about our friends.

And we live our lives trying to improve everyone.

Trying to fix them.

Trying to shape them into something better.

But the **תורה** (*Torah; the Five Books of Moses*) reminds us that as long as you are

constantly trying to improve someone, you have not yet let go.

And if you have not let go, you have not truly created.

You have not allowed that person to exist independently.

Marriage as an "Arts and Crafts Project"

Sometimes you see this in marriage.

People get married, and instead of accepting the person they married, they begin trying to change them.

They begin trying to improve them.

They treat their spouse like a project.

Like an arts-and-crafts project.

They say:

"I'm going to turn them into the person they should be."

"I'm going to help them."

"I'm going to shape them."

You sometimes hear someone say:

"Just give it a few months. Once they're married to me, I'll make sure they become more organized."

"I'll help them become more disciplined."

"I'll turn them into the person they should be."



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But when you are constantly trying to reshape someone, you never actually accept them.

You never see them for who they are.

You only see what they could become.

The Danger of Constant Improvement

When you are always trying to improve someone, you can never look at them and say:

והנה טוב מאד (*vehineh tov me'od; behold it was very good*).

You will never truly appreciate them.

Because you are always focused on the next improvement.

You are always thinking about the next adjustment.

The next correction.

The next step.

You are not relating to the person in front of you.

You are relating to your project.

And the person becomes like clay in your hands.

Like something you are constantly molding.

The Moment of Acceptance

But when you stop transforming, something beautiful happens.

You begin to experience it.

You begin to appreciate it.

You begin to look at the people in your

life and say:

They are not perfect.

But they are perfect for me.

And I love them as they are.

That is what **השם** (*Hashem; God*) did when He looked at creation and said:

והנה טוב מאד (*vehineh tov me'od; behold it was very good*).

It was not perfect.

There was still work to be done.

But from God's perspective, creation was complete.

Now the next stage belongs to humanity.

The Courage to Stop

There comes a moment in life when we must have the courage to stop.

To put down the pen.

To put down the brush.

To put down the chisel.

Stopping is not defeat.

Stopping is creation.

Because as long as something is still being edited, it is not yet a finished work.

As long as something remains in the workshop, it is still unfinished.



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As long as something is still in the warehouse, it has not yet entered the world.

Only when the creator steps back does the creation become real.

Letting Others Become Themselves

This is true for the world.

It is true for our children.

It is true for our spouses.

It is true for the people around us.

When we let go, they become themselves.

They gain their own identity.

They gain their own independence.

That is exactly what happened when **הקדוש ברוך הוא** (*HaKadosh Baruch Hu; the Holy One, Blessed be He*) created the world.

God stepped back.

And humanity was given free choice.

This is what it means that human beings are created **בצלם אלוקים** (*betzelem Elokim; in the image of God*).

We have the power to choose.

And sometimes those choices are terrible.

There were **ספרעה** (*Par'ohs; Pharaoh-like rulers*) who threw babies into the Nile.

People ask difficult questions.

Where was God during the Holocaust?

Where was God on

October 7?

To some degree — and of course God still guides the ultimate direction of history — but to some degree God stepped back.

He allowed humanity to make choices.

He allowed the world to become a place where human freedom exists.

That is the meaning of letting go.

The Two Reasons We Must Let Go

Letting go is necessary for two reasons.

First, for the sake of the creation itself.

For the sake of the child.

For the sake of the spouse.

For the sake of the world.

They need to exist independently.

They need to feel that they have their own identity.

But there is also a second reason.

Letting go is necessary for the creator.

Because if you never stop trying to fix something, you will never appreciate it.

You will always see it as something unfinished.

You will always see it as something to modify.



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Something to adjust.

Something to correct.

But once you stop, you can step back.

And you can say:

והנה טוב מאד (*vehineh tov me'od; behold it was very good*).

The True Lesson of שבת

That is the deepest lesson of שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*).

For six days we engage in מלאכה (*melacha; creative transformation*).

We build.

We transform.

We advance.

But when שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) arrives, we stop.

We stop chasing.

We stop fixing.

We stop transforming.

And instead we look at the world and say:

השם (*Hashem; God*) created a beautiful world.

My children are beautiful.

My spouse is beautiful.

The people in my life are beautiful.

They are not perfect.

But they are perfect for me.

And I accept them the way they are.

The Final

Blessing

השם (*Hashem; God*) should bless us to truly embrace the rest of שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*).

Whether that means stepping back from our work.

Stepping back from our projects.

Stepping back from the constant urge to fix everything.

Maybe it means letting go of certain ideas.

Maybe it means letting go of control over the people in our lives.

May **השם** (*Hashem; God*) bless us with the ability to rest.

To step back.

To look at the people in our lives.

And to say:

והנה טוב מאד (*vehineh tov me'od; behold it was very good*).

Not that everything is perfect.

But that it is good.

And that now the next stage belongs to them.

We have done our job.

And now we can put down the pen.

Put down the brush.

Put down the chisel.



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Sometimes the holiest act of creation is simply to stop creating.

Five Shabbat Table

Takeaway from the Lecture

The lesson of **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) is not about resting because we are tired. The rest of **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) teaches us something deeper about creation itself.

During the six days of creation, **הקדוש ברוך הוא** (*HaKadosh Baruch Hu; the Holy One, Blessed be He*) transformed the world through **מלאכה** (*melacha; creative transformation*). But the final stage of creation was not another act of transformation. The final stage was stopping.

When **השם** (*Hashem; God*) stopped creating, He allowed the world to exist independently. Only then could creation be looked at and described as **והנה טוב מאד** (*vehineh tov me'od; behold it was very good*).

This teaches us that the highest moment of creation is sometimes the ability to step back. As long as we are constantly trying to fix, mold, and improve everything around us, we are still in the process of creating. But when we stop, we can finally experience and appreciate what already exists.

שבת (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) trains us to pause from transforming the world so that we can learn to experience it. It reminds us that we do not control everything and that not everything in life needs to be perfected by us. Sometimes the holiest act of creation is learning when to put down the pen, put down the brush, and let the world — and the people in our lives — exist as they are.

Discussion Questions

1. The Torah forbids **מלאכה** (*melacha; creative transformation*) on **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*), not **עבודה** (*avodah; physical labor*). How does understanding this difference change the way we think about what “work” really means?
2. The lecture suggests that stopping is actually part of creation. Can you think of examples in life where finishing something required the strength to stop rather than to continue?
3. Why do you think it can be so difficult for people to “let go” of the things or people they helped build or shape?
4. How might the lesson of **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) help us relate differently to the people in our lives — especially spouses, children, or friends?
5. The lecture suggests that **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) teaches us to move from transforming the world to experiencing it. What practical ways can a person use **שבת** (*Shabbat; Sabbath*) to appreciate life more deeply instead of constantly chasing improvement?