

THE SECRET OF SHABBOS DELIGHT

by Rabbi Label Lam

Moshe called the whole community of the Children of Israel to assemble, and he said to them: "These are the things that HASHEM commanded to make: Six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall sanctify, a day of complete rest to HASHEM; whoever performs work on it [this day] shall be put to death. You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwelling places on the Sabbath day." (Shemos 35:1-3)

Why did the Torah single out not kindling a fire on Shabbos as the representative of all the other Malachos of Shabbos?

Now let us pause and appreciate the necessity for an Oral Torah. Anyone familiar with the observance of Shabbos already knows that there are 39 fundamental forbidden activities on the Holy Shabbos and yet the only one mentioned explicitly here is not to light a fire. If we did not have an Oral Torah then how would we know what not to do to preserve Shabbos?

This is a problem not only native to Shabbos but it is also true of every Mitzvah in the Torah. There is not one law that can be performed in its entirety based only on the information provided in the written text of Torah.

Let's take a simple one that every decent person can agree upon: "Don't kill!" OK, as intelligent western thinkers we can have an all-night debate about when life begins and when life ends and never come to a conclusion. What one person would define as euthanasia another would call murder. What one would call "family planning" another would identify as murder. The Torah had to have had some quantifiable definition of else how can the Sanhedrin be charged with carrying out an execution for murder if the boundaries are unclear?

The same holds true of Shabbos. Here we have the Torah spelling out clearly, "; whoever performs work (Malacha) on it [this day] shall be put to death". Well, what is "Malacha"-work? Where is it spelled out clear enough to provide a warning to one who would trample the garden of Shabbos? Can it be capricious or vague and yet worthy of death.

Don't think that no one ever tried to manage living a Torah life without the assistance and guidance of an Oral Law. It has been attempted many times over the millennium. Take the Karaites for example. The movement started in Babylonia in about the 9th century, not long after the sealing of the Talmud. The Name "Kara"-ites, comes from the term for verse, or text, as it is read. They sought

to dispute the adherents to the Oral Torah and therefore they attempted to hold tenaciously to the written Torah as it is spelled out and without any assistance from the Talmud.

Certainly their intentions, deep down, were to make life easy and to relieve themselves from the burden of Hallacha. This provided a universe of leniencies and no doubt it was attractive to many, but for how long? Six days! When it came to Shabbos they found themselves in a stuck place. While Torah Law allows a person to set up a guarded fire prior to Shabbos and to light Shabbos candles before the onset of Shabbos, the Karaites had to remain loyal to the one forbidden act mentioned explicitly in the text. It is actually a Rabbinical requirement for a Jewish household to have candles lit for the Shabbos. It is a necessary to have delicacies and even hot food, namely cholent. The Prophet calls the Shabbos, "delight"-(Oneg) and it is!

The Karaite Shabbos was not so pleasurable. They needed to sit in the dark and in the cold. The Talmud tells us that a blind man has less pleasure from his food. It seems that psychologically, a great deal of the joy of eating is in the anticipation, hence the great culinary emphasis on colorful presentations. It must not be so much fun to not be able to see what you are eating or what might be crawling on what you are eating at night. Oy!

It is stated, "So the Children of Israel should observe the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant." (Shemos 31:16) How is it to remain an everlasting covenant from generation to generation in the cold and the dark? That just might be one reason the Torah mentioned only "fire" as a forbidden act, to extinguish those who would lose **the secret of Shabbos delight!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).