

And the seventh day is Shabbos to G-d, your G-d, on it you shall not perform any kind of (creative) work. (20:10)

Throughout the millennia, when a Jew sought to become more “progressive,” to distance himself from “archaic” tradition, the first tennet that went was *Shabbos*. The student of history is quite aware that this was the area that caved in first. Almost two hundred years ago, the self-styled secular Jew in Germany took a more intellectual approach to doing away first, with *Shabbos*, and then, with the rest of the Torah, by defining the above *pasuk* as, “You shall not do any kind of work.” This distorted the entire concept of *Shabbos* and undermined its laws of observance. This was the home of those who denounced their allegiance to *Sinai* with the claim “bring the law into line with life,” rather than follow the path of the Torah Jew who understands that “life must be brought into line with the law.” Thus, *Shabbos*, which forms the basis of all Jewish life, was reinterpreted to conform with the demands of life. Accordingly, the *melachah* which was prohibited on *Shabbos* was interpreted simply as work, which was then defined incorrectly as any activity involving physical exertion.

Given this misinterpretation, any work that was in fact creative but not physically exertive, was not prohibited. Light physical activities, or tasks performed for intellectual activity, were not forbidden. After all, they were not work. Thus, their idea of reconciling the law with life was accomplished.

Indeed, *melachah* has a deeper meaning, one which goes to the very core of defining work and its relationship with Hashem’s resting from the act of creating the world. Observance of *Shabbos* is defined as cessation of all activities classed as “creation”, with the desecration of *Shabbos* being the direct opposite: performance of *melachah*, or what might be referred to as intelligent labor, creative work.

In his commentary to the *Chumash*, **Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl**, notes that the *mechallel Shabbos*, desecrator of *Shabbos*, is not one who does not go to the synagogue on *Shabbos*, but the one who performs a *melachah*. The *mekoshesh eitzim*, the first *Shabbos* desecrator, who gathered brushwood on *Shabbos*, was sentenced for gathering brushwood. They did not inquire of him if he had already given *Shabbos* “its due”, by attending services or by listening to the rabbi’s sermon, as some would have us believe. If the synagogue is too far from one’s house, he either moves closer or does not attend. Driving is not a permissible option – regardless of how “non-exerting” it might be.

Rav Hirsch observes that the actual word *melachah* is not based upon physical exertion. The term, which occurs almost 200 times in the Torah, is never used in conjunction with strenuous activity. Indeed, the slave labor performed by our ancestors in Egypt was called *avodah*, derived from *eved*, slave. It was not *melachah*. The term *melachah*, as explained by Rav Hirsch, is etymologically connected with *malach*, angel (same root spelling) which does not indicate activities that involve lesser or greater exertion, but, rather, solely activities connected with the intellect carrying out an

intention. Therefore, even if we were not aware of *Chazal's* definition of work, the mere fact that the Torah chose the word *melachah*, a word used almost 200 times – and never in connection with pure physical exertion, we would know that, “You shall not perform any kind of work on *Shabbos*” is a reference to work of creativity – not physical exertion. Clearly, one sees in the Torah what he wants to see, and applies his misinterpretation to suit his personal needs.