

AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps
Torah Portion: *Va-Yakhel*

ALL WORK - EVEN SACRED TASKS - STOPS ON SHABBAT

למה נאמרה פרשה זו, לפי שהוא אומר "ועשו לי מקדש".
שומע אני בין בחול בין בשבת.
ומה אני מקיים מחלליה "מות יומת"? בשאר כל מלאכות חוץ ממלאכת המשכן .
במלאכת המשכן!! ומה אני מקיים, "ועשו לי מקדש", בשאר כל הימים חוץ מן השבת;
או אף בשבת, והדין נותן, ומה עבודה שאינה באה אלא מכח המכשירין הרי היא
דוחה שבת, מכשירי עבודה שאין עבודה באה אלא מכחן, אינו דין שידחו את השבת, כגון
שניטלה קרנו של מזבח או שנפגמה הסכין, שומע אני יתקנם בשבת.
תלמוד לומר: "ויקהל משה", בחול ולא בשבת.

Why are verses [describing the observance of shabbat] written at the beginning of this week's Torah portion, which deals entirely with the construction of the sanctuary? Because it says earlier *Make a sanctuary for me*. (Ex. 25:8).

Now, I might have understood the commandment *Make a sanctuary for me* to mean that the building of the sanctuary takes place even on shabbat. If so, how [you might ask] would I explain the warning, *Anyone who profanes the sabbath shall surely die?* (Ex.35:2) I would say that the warning applies to all work except the construction of the sanctuary.

This points out the way in which verse *Make a sanctuary for me* is ambiguous. It might mean that the construction of the sanctuary takes places on every day but the sabbath, or it might mean that the work goes on during the sabbath, too.

Therefore, this week's Torah portion states right up front: *Then Moses Gathered the entire Israelite community and said to them, "These are the things that God has commanded you to do: On six days, work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a sabbath of complete rest, holy to God."* (Ex. 35:1-2). Only then does Moses explain the tasks required for the building of the sanctuary. This teaches us that the sanctuary is built during the other six days of the week, but not on shabbat.

[Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael, massekhet d'Shabta, va-Yakhel, parasba #1]

QUESTIONS: The work we do for social change is endlessly demanding. There is never enough time to do the many very urgent things that need to be done. Even so, the teaching above insists that even our most important, sacred work – even including things we are sure that God would want us to do – must be put aside when the sabbath begins. What would justify a 25 hour break in the pursuit of justice every week?