

Six Days Shall You Labor

Torah Quote

Six days shall you labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest. (Exodus 34:21)

Questions

-Is 'Six days shall you labor' a positive commandment? (It says 'shall', not 'may'.)

No. Rabbis do not list it among the 613 mitzvot.

-Why not?

-If not a commandment,

-Why doesn't Torah just say 'Do no work on the 7th day'? Why mention the six days?

-Are we at liberty to 'rest' for more than one day a week?

The six instances of 'six days shall you labor' in Torah

1. Ex 20:9. Six days shall you labor, and accomplish all your work

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד, וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל-מְלֶאכֶתְךָ

2. Ex 31:15. In six days work will be done

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים, יַעֲשֶׂה מְלֶאכֶה

3. Ex 34:21. Six days shall you labor [same as beginning of (1)]

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד

4. Ex 35:2. In six days work will be done [same as (2) but correct feminine 'teaseh' is used, as 'melacha' is feminine]

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים, תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלֶאכֶה

5. Lev 23:3. In six days work will be done [same as (4)]

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים, תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלֶאכֶה

6. Deut 5:13. Six days shall you labor, and accomplish all your work
[same as (1)]

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד, וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל-מְלַאכְתֶּךָ

Discussion

Work is very important in the Jewish tradition

Pirkei Avot 1:10

Shema'yah used to say: **Love work.** [Ehav et hamlachah]

Avot D'Rabbi Natan 11:1

Shemaya and Avtalyon received [the tradition] from them. Shemaya says, "Love work, hate acting the superior, and don't get too close to the government." Love work? How? It teaches that a man should love work and not hate work, and **just as the Torah was given in a covenant, so too work was given in a covenant, as it says, (Exodus 20:9) "Six days you shall labor and do all your work but the seventh is a Shabbat to the Lord your God."** *[Implies Shabbat is a reward for work?]*

Rabbi Akiva says, "**Sometimes a man does work and is saved from death and other times he does not do work and incurs the death penalty from God.** How? If a man sat all week and did no work, and therefore had nothing to eat, and he had money that had been dedicated to the Temple in his possession, and used it to purchase food and ate, he is liable to the death penalty from God [i.e., he cannot be executed by a court but God will kill him.] But, if he worked all week building the Temple, even though he was paid out of Temple funds, and he took from them [and purchased food] and ate, he is saved from death. [i.e. he did nothing wrong.]

R. Dostai said: "How can it happen that one who did no work all the six days shall finally be compelled to labor all seven days? Strange as this appears, yet it may happen. For instance, a man who did no work during the week, Friday comes and he has nothing to eat. He starts to look for work, but is seized by conscription officers, who, holding him by an iron chain, compel him to make up on Shabbat for what he neglected during the six days."

R. Simeon b. Elazar said: **Even Adam the First tasted nothing before he performed some work,** as it is written [Gen. 2:15]: "And put him into

the garden of Eden, to, till it and to keep it"; and afterward he was commanded: "Of every tree in the garden you may freely eat" [Gen. 2:16].

R. Tarphon said: Even the Holy One, blessed be He, rested not His Shekhina in the midst of Israel before some work was performed by them, as it is written [Ex. 25:9]: "And they shall make me a sanctuary; and I will dwell in the midst of them."

Rabbi Yehuda Ben Beteira says, "**Someone who has no work to do**, what should he do? If he has a desolate courtyard or a desolate field, **he should go and busy himself** in it, as it is written, "Six days you will labor and do all your work." What is taught by, "and do all your work"? To include someone that has desolate courtyards or desolate fields, he should go and busy himself. Rabbi Tarfon says, "**A man only dies due to being idle** [Heb. batala], as it is written, (Genesis 49:33) 'and he expired and was gathered to his people.' " [Weak old people die because they can't work?].

Rambam

10. **Anyone, however, who makes up his mind to study Torah and not work but live on charity profanes the name of God, disgraces the Torah, obscures the light of religion, causes harm to himself, and deprives himself of life in the future world;** for it is forbidden to derive temporal advantage from the words of the Torah. The sages said: "Whoever makes selfish use of the teachings of the Torah takes his own life." They further told us: "Do not make of them a crown wherewith to magnify yourself, nor a spade wherewith to dig." They urged us strongly moreover: "Love work, and hate arrogance. All Torah study which is not combined with some work must at length fail and occasion sin" (Ethics of the Fathers). The end of such a person will be that he will rob his fellow man.

11. **Anyone who maintains himself by the work of his hands possesses a great virtue, a virtue of the early saints, whereby he will attain all the glory and happiness of both this and the future world, as it is written: "When you eat the fruit of the labor of your hands, you shall be happy and it shall be well with you" (Psalms 128:2).** "You shall be happy" in this world, "and it shall be well with you" in the future world, which will be altogether good.

(Rambam, The Laws of Torah Study, Mishneh Torah, Sefer Ha-mada (Book of Knowledge))

Note: Rabbis used to work for a living (see below). Sephardic rabbis still do. But modern Western rabbis live just on being rabbis. In Israel, lots of scholars survive on charity alone.

The Sages worked for a living

Days of Talmud

Hillel was a woodchopper and well-digger

Shammai was a builder (contractor)

Rabbi Yochanan b. Zakkai was a businessman for forty years

Rabbi Yehoshua b. Chananiah was a blacksmith

Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Chananel were scribes

Rabbi Chanina sold bees' honey

Rabbi Chiyya the Elder, Rabbi Shimon ben Rabbi, and Rabbi Shimon ben

Gamliel traded silk at Tyre (Gen. R. 77:2)

Rabbi Yochanan HaSandlar was a shoemaker (HaSandlar = The Sandal-Maker)

Rabbi Yehuda the Baker was... guess what

Rabbi Yosi b. Chalafta was a tanner

Rabbi Yehuda ben Isaiah was known as 'the perfume-maker'

"The world cannot exist without a perfume-maker and without a tanner.

Happy is he whose craft is that of a perfume-maker, and woe to him who is a tanner by trade" (Kiddushin 82b)

Rabbi Yehoshua the Grit-Dealer

Rabbi Shimon P'kuli was a cotton dealer

Rabbi Shmuel b. Shilas was a school teacher

Rabbi Safra and Rabbi Dimi of Nehardea were merchants

Rabbi Abba b. Zavina was a tailor

Rabbi Yosef b. Chiya and Rabbi Yannai owned vineyards

Rabbi Huna was a farmer and raised cattle

Rabbi Chisda and Rabbi Papa were beer brewers

Abba Chilkiyah was a field laborer

Abba Shaul was a gravedigger

Abba Hoshiya was a launderer and stomped olives with Rabbi Chiyya the Elder

Karna was a wine smeller (determined how long wine could last before going bad)

Rabbi Chiya b. Yosef was in the salt business

Rabbi Eleazar ben Rabbi Zadoq and Rabbi Shaul ben Botnit were storekeepers in Jerusalem all their life

Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah made profit from oil and wine all his life

Abba Bar Abba was a silk merchant; and

His son (Mar) Shmuel was a physician

Many were in the textile industry (Bavot)

Some had inherited wealth

After Talmud

Rashi was a vintner (grew vineyards and made wine)

The Rambam and the Ramban were physicians

Others will do the work if Jews are observant

Mechilta at Ki Tisa:

One verse says, "six days work will be done" [passive voice] and another says, "six days you will work and do all your labor" [active voice]. How can both be true?

It means that **in a time that Israel is doing the will of God, their work will be done by others**, as it says "work will be done."

And so too it says in Isaiah 61:5, "And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and tend your vineyards. But you shall be named the Priests of the Lord; men shall call you the Ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory."

And when they don't do the will of God, they will do their work themselves, as it says, "and you will do all your work."

Used by some ultra-Orthodox to justify studying Torah all the time and doing no work Is work a religious obligation or punishment (or necessary evil) for not being observant enough?

Chabad: Passive voice means God is doing the work for you if you are observant, even though you are doing it yourself.

Sforno on Ex 34:21: You shall succeed in your 6 days of work when you observe Shabbat on the 7th.

'Pretend' you did all your work

Rashi: When Shabbat arrives one should 'feel' as though work were finished, even though it is not.

So Shabbat is not only deed but also attitude. Can't really 'accomplish all work' in 6 days, but one should feel as much at ease as if one had.

Work is defined narrowly

'Work' is technically defined by 39 activities ('melachot') that become prohibited on Shabbat:

1. Carrying
2. Burning
3. Extinguishing
4. Finishing

5. Writing
6. Erasing
7. Cooking
8. Washing

9. Sewing
10. Tearing
11. Knotting
12. Untying

13. Shaping
14. Plowing
15. Planting
16. Reaping

17. Harvesting
18. Threshing
19. Winnowing
20. Selecting
21. Sifting
22. Grinding

23. Kneading
24. Combing
25. Spinning
26. Dyeing
27. Chain-stitching
28. Warping

29. Weaving
30. Unraveling
31. Building
32. Demolishing
33. Trapping
34. Shearing

35. Slaughtering
36. Skinning
37. Tanning
38. Smoothing
39. Marking

So the commandment to ‘work’ the rest of the week can be fulfilled by engaging in any one of them and no more (i.e., do work that is not for a living or to keep occupied).

So interpreting ‘six days shall you labor’ as a positive commandment would not accomplish much.

Work provides contrast

To appreciate rest properly, you have to work the rest of the time. Focus of verse is Shabbat. Real meaning: “IF you work for six days, THEN you will really appreciate resting on the seventh”.