



B'NAI DAVID-JUDEA

Shabbat Shorts

They may seem at first to be a natural combination. The intensely community-focused nature of Shabbat, and the holy activities of visiting the sick and comforting the mourner. We'd be surprised to hear that the latter activities might be forbidden on Shabbat. But our Sages debated precisely this possibility. (Talmud Shabbat 12a - b)

Bet Shamai forbade both things on Shabbat. Though the Talmud presents no explicit rationales, the ban on visiting the sick on is presumably connected to the rule that we (for the most part) avoid petitional prayer on Shabbat, so that we can spend the day focused on the many blessings with which God has filled our lives, rather than the things which we are yet in need of. And since by Halachic tradition, visits with the sick *must* include a prayer for the person's recovery, Bet Shamai could not see clear to visits being carried out on Shabbat. Their ban on comforting mourners is presumably based upon the fear that the comforter might unwittingly, and certainly unintentionally, reinforce and deepen the mourner's anguish and sense of loss. And while Shabbat is regarded as one of the days of shiva, the hope is that it is different in nature than the other six days, with Shabbat itself providing a unique dimension of comfort.

And interestingly, although Bet Hillel is cited as permitting both visiting the sick and comforting the mourner (presumably on the grounds that visitors typically relieve a least some measure of suffering), subsequent generations of Talmudic scholars continued to grapple with the issue, producing the curious and unusual bottom

line, "with difficulty the Sages permitted the visiting of the sick and the comforting of the mourners on Shabbat". This unusual locution is interpreted by later poskim to mean that Bet Hillel's position is adopted as a matter of law (for many potential visitors and comforters are only available when they are not busy working), but that people should be discouraged from specifically waiting for Shabbat to make their visit.

The fact that that our tradition experiences such tension over this question is interesting and worthy of further thought. Meanwhile though, there are two noteworthy Shabbat practices which emerge from this issue.

One comes directly from the discussion in the Talmud. "The Sages taught that one who visits a sick person on Shabbat does not pray for him in the manner customary during the week; rather, he says: "On Shabbat it is prohibited to cry out , and healing is soon to come (שבת היא מלזעוק ורפואה קרובה לבא) ". This is codified by Rama, and is in fact incorporated on Shabbat into our "Mi SheBerach" for the ill (with a similar phrase for Yom Tov). [Fascinating note: Aruch HaShulchan was astounded by the inclusion in the Mi SheBerach on Shabbat of the phrase "and may God send them Refuah Shleyma", as this is precisely what should not be said on Shabbat, yet he acknowledges that all the siddurim publish it this way, and that all the people recite it this way! Very interesting.]

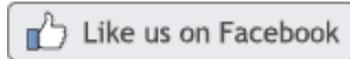
The second practice is the perhaps unintended consequence of a ruling of the early modern *posek*, P'ri Megadim, who wrote that if a mourner (in the midst of *shiva*) appears in shul on Friday night after "Mizmor shir l'yom HaShabbat" has already been recited, then the *gabbai* should not call out - as his customarily does - "all rise and receive the mourner". P'ri Megadim was pointing out that once "Mizmor Shir" has been recited, Shabbat has been accepted, and public expressions of mourning and comforting are forbidden. But his ruling seems to have generated our practice to *davka* rise and receive the mourner immediately before the recitation of "Mizmor shir".

May we be blessed to always find the right balance between sacred time and sacred rituals.

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