

Who Is Considered a *Shomer Shabbos* According to *Halocho*? (Jewish Religious Law)

Rabbi Herbert Birnbaum

The secret of Israel's survival is the observance of the Shabbos as the fundamental institution of Judaism and the very foundation of our faith. The Torah teaches "to sanctify" the Shabbos, "to remember" the Shabbos, "to observe" the Shabbos, "to rest" on the Shabbos, and "to guard" the Shabbos. These positive commandments are translated into action through lighting candles before Shabbos; reciting *Kiddush* over a cup of wine before dinner on both Friday night and Saturday noon, using two *Challos* for the breaking of bread ceremony at all three meals on Shabbos, singing *Zemiros* during the, festive meals, attending synagogue services, listening to, studying or at least reviewing the weekly *Sedrah* (selection from the Pentateuch), relaxing, visiting friends, and, finally, bidding farewell to the Shabbos Queen by reciting *Havdolah* or the Separation Blessings over a cup of wine, fragrant spices and twisted candle after the appearance of three stars.

For a Jew to earn the privilege to be known as a *Shomer Shabbos Ke'hilchoso*, an Orthodox Shabbos Observer According to Jewish Religious Law as stipulated in the *Shulchan Oruch* and the later universally accepted codifications of the myriad laws of Shabbos compliance, he must not only fulfill the positive commandments outlined above, but he must also cease and desist, unless in a case of *Pikuach Nefesh*, imminent threat to human life, of all types of *Melocho* (usually translated as work) as demanded in the Ten Commandments; "On the seventh day is Shabbos to the L-ord you G-d, you shall not do any manner of *Melocho*." The *Mishna* (Shabbat 7:2) enumerates 39 main categories of *Melocho* which form a cross-section of all major types of human productive and constructive activity which make some significant change in our environment.

The hallmark restrictions, derived either from the Written and Oral Torah, talmudic ordinances, or later rabbinic decrees, willingly accepted by the Orthodox Shabbos Observer in his public behavior would include: abstaining from all forms of business pursuits, gainful employment or shopping, to forgo riding or driving in an automobile or other modes of transportation, not utilizing the services of a beauty shop or barber shop and refraining from all activities associated with garden care, lawn maintenance, or improving any type of structure, in his private domain the *Shomer Shabbos* does not cook, bake, wash clothes, iron, knit, crochet, embroider, write, draw, paint, color, type, shave, light a candle, smoke, play a musical instrument, rearrange furniture, read business correspondence, or prepare for post Shabbos activities.

This brief, and certainly NOT all inclusive summary of the laws of Shabbos hopefully will clarify which Jew is entitled to be called a *Shomer Shabbos Ke'hilchoso*.

May we all be privileged "to call the Shabbos a delight" as we read in the prophetic portion of Yom Kippur morning:

If you turn your foot away because of Shabbos,
From pursuing your business on My holy day,
And you will call the Shabbos a delight,
Honored and holy to G-d;
And you shall honor it, by not doing your own ways,
Not pursuing your own business, nor speaking your own words,
Then shall you delight yourself in the L-rd
And I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth,
And I shall feed you the inheritance of Jacob, your father,
For the mouth of the L-rd has spoken. (Isaiah 58:13-14)

- Ref: To Be A Jew by Rabbi Haylm Halevy Donin, Basic Books, Inc., N.Y., 1972, pp. 61-96.
The Sabbath by Dayan Dr. I. Grunfeld, Philipp Feldheim, Inc., N.Y., 1959, pp 1-87.
Challenge of Sinai, by Rabbi Zechariah Fendel, Hashkafah Publications, N.Y., 1978, pp. 23-80.
"The Jewish Sabbath", in Judaism Eternal, by Rabbi Samson Raphael, Hirsch, translated by Dayan Dr. I. Grunfeld, Soncino Press, London, 1967, pp. 3-48.