

Halakhot of Yom Tob

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I. Overview

The Torah prescribes six days of *yamim tobim* (“good days,” festivals) in the course of a year:

- * The first day of Pesah, Nissan 15
- * The seventh day of Pesah, Nissan 21
- * Shabu`ot, Sivan 6
- * Rosh Hashanah, Tishri 1
- * The first day of Sukkot, Tishri 15
- * Shemini Asseret, the eighth day from the first day of Sukkot, Tishri 22.

Yom Kippur (Tishri 10) is not counted amongst *yamim tobim* as it is not a celebratory day.

Each yom tob commemorates and celebrates a different feature of the nation of Israel’s history and its relationship with G-d. Pesah commemorates G-d’s redemption of the Israelites from bondage and the Exodus from Egypt; Shabu`ot corresponds with G-d’s revelation on Mount Sinai and establishment of the Covenant between Him and Israel; Rosh Hashanah (beginning of the new year) marks Divine kingship and human accountability; Sukkot recalls G-d’s protection and providence over Israel.

In the Diaspora there are twelve *yamim tobim* each year: the first two and last two days of Pesah, two days of Shabu`ot, two days of Rosh Hashanah, the first two days of Sukkot and two days of Shemini Asseret.

The reason each yom tob is celebrated for two days in the Diaspora follows. In Mishnaic times the Israelites did not use a fixed calendar; rather, the *bet din hagadol* (the High Court) awaited witnesses to testify that they saw the new moon and then declared *rosh hodesh* (the advent of the new month) accordingly. In this manner the dates for the upcoming festivals were set. In lands outside Israel there often was a doubt as to which of two possible days was declared the first of the month. This problem was a result of the fact that the lunar cycle is always approximately 29 1/2 days and it was possible that the first of the month could have been established on either of two possible days. (If witnesses did not arrive when expected, rosh hodesh was declared on the next day.) Because of the limited communications of the times, the doubt outside Israel was not always resolved by the time the festival arrived; in order to preserve the sanctity of the festivals, two days were observed for each.

In later Talmudic times, when a fixed calendar was used and there was no doubt as to when the first of the month occurred, the two day observance was retained out of concern that things may return to their previous state. Although modern communications renders the problem of the doubt inconceivable, legislation that was decreed by the High Court (Sanhedrin) cannot be annulled without the reconvening of another High Court, which has not been done these many centuries. Hopefully, we will merit its speedy reestablishment.

II. Prohibited and Permitted Work and Activities

Work and activities that are prohibited on Shabbat, whether from the Torah or by rabbinic enactment, are prohibited on yom tob, with certain major exceptions. Thus, writing, building, shearing, sewing, weaving, buying and selling, etc., are prohibited. However, the Torah permitted work of *okhel nefesh* on yom tob, that is, work that is performed for the purpose of eating on the day. Thus, kneading, baking, cooking, slaughtering and salting meat, are permitted.

Actions that are part of the overall system of *okhel nefesh*, but which are not generally done for the purpose of eating on the day they are performed – such as harvesting, threshing, grinding and hunting – are prohibited.

Using fire and carrying from domain to domain are permitted. Since these are so pervasively intertwined with *okhel nefesh* they are permitted in and of themselves, even if not specifically done for eating, provided they are done for some benefit that will be derived during the day. Thus, heating water (opening the hot water faucet) to wash one's face, arms and legs is permitted. Heating water to wash the whole body at once, such as in the case of a shower, involves a technical question and should be limited to the second day only (when it is not Shabbat).

Generating a new fire, however, is prohibited, even if done for the purpose of preparing food. The permissibility of using fire requires a pre-existing fire. This halakha is clear from the Talmud, Rambam and Shulhan Arukh. Rishon Lesion Hakham Obadiah Yosef writes that this prohibition includes striking a match. He acknowledges that several rabbis of stature in recent past generations considered a match as equivalent to extending a fire as it was deemed to contain fire in its tip. However, he states that this is not the view of the overwhelming majority of leading rabbis and that those accustomed to striking matches on yom tob should discontinue doing so.

One may turn on a gas range that has a pilot light as this does not involve generating a new fire but extending an extant fire. Many new gas ranges create a new fire when turned on and are the equivalent of striking a match, thus necessitating leaving a small flame on from before yom tob if one is interested in using it on the festival. If a non-Jewish housekeeper kindles a gas range for her personal use, she may be asked to leave it on.

Wheeling a carriage, playing ball and roller skating are permitted on yom tob. Of course, if something breaks it is prohibited to repair it on yom tob.

Muqseh applies to yom tob as to Shabbat; thus, although carrying is permitted on yom tob, carrying money or moving it, etc., is prohibited.

Cooking on one day of yom tob for the next day, whether the next day is a weekday, another yom tob or Shabbat, is prohibited. This applies to all permissible *melakhot* of yom tob. However, it is permitted to cook during the day for the upcoming evening meal if the meal will be started before nightfall. (This is common on Shabu`ot when many congregations pray arbit of the second day early.) It is also permitted to cook dishes that children may partake of before sundown even if the majority of those dishes will be served at night.

When yom tob falls out on Friday, it is necessary to prepare an *erub tabshilin* from before yom tob to permit cooking on Friday for Shabbat. The erub, comprising a cooked item such as a hard-boiled egg, and customarily a baked item such as a loaf of bread or matzah, is designated to be part of the Shabbat meal; thus, preparation for the Shabbat meal is considered to have begun before the onset of yom tob and in such a case the

rabbis did not apply their prohibition of preparing for Shabbat. A berakha “*Al Misvat Erub*” is recited. The erub should not be eaten before Shabbat, and surely not before the conclusion of cooking on Friday for Shabbat; preferably, it should be part of the Shabbat meals, making *hamosi* on the loaf of bread. When yom tob falls on Thursday and Friday, the erub only permits cooking on Friday for Shabbat.

Although today we use a fixed calendar and know that the first day of yom tob is the actual day of the festival according to the Torah and the second day is from rabbinical enactment, both days are treated equally except for the following few exceptions:

1. It is permitted to engage in burying the dead on the second day, performing all the work that is necessary.
2. The rabbinic prohibitions associated with *refu'ah* (therapeutic practices and medications) that are applicable on Shabbat for someone who is not in a life-threatening condition do not apply to the second day of yom tob.
3. In accordance with the famous rule that governs doubtful issues in halakha, doubts in halakha concerning matters of the first day are generally resolved strictly while those of the second day are resolved leniently.

The first two exceptions do not apply to the two days of Rosh Hashanah.

III. Candle Lighting, Qiddush and Habdalah

Candles (or oil lamps) are lit for yom tob, customarily by the woman of the home just as is the case for Shabbat; the berakha is ‘*Lehadlik Ner Shel Yom Tob.*’ *Sheheheyanu* should generally not be recited with candle-lighting as it is expected to be recited in *qiddush*.

The evening *qiddush* of yom tob begins with the berakha on wine, followed by a berakha that includes mention of the particular festival. If it is also Shabbat, the wording of the festival *qiddush* is recited with the mention of Shabbat included. Except for the last two nights of Pesah (which do not commemorate a “newly arrived” festival), *sheheheyanu* is also recited in the *qiddush*. On Sukkot, if one is eating in a sukkah, the blessing of *Lesheb BaSukkah* is attached to the *qiddush*.

When the festival falls on Saturday night, *qiddush* includes habdalah (in such a case making a distinction between “holy” and “less-holy”). The first two berakhot are recited as usual for the festival, followed by the berakha for fire (on a candle or an oil lamp). Then the berakha of habdalah is recited. If it is a yom tob that requires *sheheheyanu*, it is recited fifth. Fragrant spices are not included in habdalah on a festival.

At the conclusion of yom tob, even between yom tob and hol hamo`ed (the intermediate days of Pesah and Sukkot), habdalah on wine is recited except when Shabbat immediately follows the conclusion of yom tob. In the latter case, only the standard Friday night *qiddush* is recited, for it would be inappropriate to mention the “departure” of yom tob in the *qiddush* for Shabbat. In the habdalah at the conclusion of yom tob only two berakhot are recited - on wine and the standard habdalah berakha that is recited on Saturday nights all year long.

IV. General Halakhot

It is a requirement to honor and enjoy yom tob. The Torah prescribes a special mitzvah to be joyous on the festival. One must make preparations for this purpose. Families eat together and guests are invited. In our happiness we are required to

remember the lonely and needy and share our blessings with them. It is incumbent on all to make efforts to invite them to participate in our festive meals and to provide for their welfare.

Yom tob annuls the “*shib`ah*” for one who is “sitting” in mourning for a family member, including one sitting for father or mother. This applies only if the mourner sat at least a short time before the onset of the festival. Yom Kippur also annuls “*shib`ah*.”

If someone passed away on the festival, the seven-day mourning period does not begin until after the conclusion of the complete festival, including hol hamo`ed. Until then, only restricted, private mourning is permitted. The second day of yom tob, when it concludes the festival, counts as day one since it is of rabbinical derivation and the individual did practice a degree of private mourning.

V. Prayers

In each amida of yom tob it is necessary to recite the portion that reflects the particular festival. If one mistakenly prayed a weekday amida without mentioning the holiday he must repeat the amida and recite the one for yom tob. Musaf is recited daily, including during hol hamo`ed. Tefillin are not donned on yom tob. A special psalm associated with the theme of the day is recited for each yom tob, evening and morning.

Hallel is recited on all yamim tobim except on Rosh Hashanah. On the first two days of Pesah, on Shabu`ot, and on all nine days of Sukkot-Shemini Asseret, it is complete Hallel with a berakha; on the later days of Pesah it is recited without a berakha.

Special portions are read from two *Sifre Torah*. On yamim tobim there are at least five `olim to the Torah plus maftir. The Torah is not read at minha (unless it happens to be Shabbat).

Ya`ale veyabo is recited in birkat hamazon. If one concluded birkat hamazon and realized he did not recite it, he does not repeat, except on the first night of Pesah and the first night of Sukkot in the sukkah, as on these two occasions the requirement to eat at least a *kazzayit* matzah on Pesah and a *kazzayit* bread in the sukkah on Sukkot is mandatory. If one realized he did not recite *ya`ale veyabo* after concluding the third berakha but before beginning the fourth, he should make the relevant insertion as found in the *mahzor*.