

Laws of Yom Tov (Jewish Holidays)

Yom Tov refers to the biblically mandated Jewish holidays:

- Rosh Hashanah,
- Sukkot (the first and last days),
- Shemini Atzeret,
- Pesach (Passover – first and last days),
- and Shavuot.

In Israel, each holiday is kept for one day. Outside of Israel, due to historical uncertainty in the calendar (before modern communication), holidays are observed for two days. This second day is called Yom Tov Sheni shel Galuyot (Second Day of the Festival for the Diaspora), originally a safek (doubt) but now a firmly kept minhag (custom). Even today, with preset calendars, this practice remains in place.

Note: Anywhere in modern-day Israel counts as Israel for this purpose.

Work on Yom Tov vs. Shabbat

Yom Tov shares the same 39 melachot (prohibited labors) as Shabbat, but with some exceptions for food-related activities (ochel nefesh – preparation of food for consumption):

Permitted on Yom Tov:

- Carrying (Hotza'ah)
- Burning (Hav'ara)
- Cooking/Baking (Bishul/Afiyah)

Only when related to food preparation or other needs of the day.

Still Prohibited:

- Harvesting, grinding, picking produce, capturing animals, etc., even if related to food—because these are considered major labor and were not permitted even for food.

Preparatory Actions – Makhshirei Ochal Nefesh

Makhshirei ochel nefesh means “preparations for food preparation.” These are allowed on Yom Tov only if they couldn't reasonably be done before Yom Tov. For example:

- Sharpening a knife if it broke unexpectedly.
- Rekindling a flame if it went out.

But if it could have been done earlier, it should have been done before Yom Tov.

Mitoch Principle

There's a halachic principle:

“Mitoch she'hutra letzorech, hutra nami shelo letzorech” –

“Since it was permitted for a need, it is also permitted for other types of needs (but not unnecessary ones).”

So once you can cook or carry for food, you can also cook or carry for other legitimate Yom Tov needs, like bathing or lighting a room.

Bathing on Yom Tov

You are allowed to bathe on Yom Tov using hot water from the home system (e.g. a shower or bath). This does not refer to large communal bathhouses.

Fire on Yom Tov

- Lighting a fire: You may light a flame from an existing flame (not strike a new match). But in many circumstances, where you could not light it before Yom Tov, you can strike a match or use a lighter on Yom Tov.
- Turning off a stove: You can turn off a gas stove (there's no wick or flame being extinguished in the usual sense).
- Putting out a fire: Extinguishing a flame like a candle or a wood burning fire is not allowed, unless there's danger.

Techum Shabbat

The concept of techum (territorial boundary) applies on Yom Tov just like Shabbat. You may not walk more than 2,000 amot (~4,000 feet or $\sim\frac{3}{4}$ mile) beyond the city limits. Inside cities, it's not an issue.

Since techum is d'rabanen (rabbinic), safek techum (doubtful cases) are permitted.

Carrying and Markets

You may carry in public on Yom Tov if it's for a purpose—e.g., food, a siddur, etc.—but not just for fun or without reason.

You may go to the market and take items on credit, provided you'll pay after Yom Tov.

Eruv Tavshilin

If Yom Tov falls on Friday, and Shabbat follows, you may cook on Yom Tov for Shabbat—but only if you made an Eruv Tavshilin before Yom Tov.

This involves:

- Taking a matzah or bread and a cooked food (like a hard-boiled egg)
- Saying a bracha and declaration (found in siddurim)
- Setting it aside

If you forgot, your local rabbi would have made one on behalf of the community.

Simchat Yom Tov – The Joy of the Holiday

There is a mitzvah of simchat Yom Tov (rejoicing on the festival):

- Enjoy meat, wine, and delicacies
- Ensure children and spouse are happy
- Buy toys or special treats

It's part of making the day spiritually and emotionally uplifting.

Chol HaMoed – The Intermediate Days

Found during Pesach and Sukkot, between the first and last Yom Tov days.

Chol HaMoed has rules midway between Yom Tov and weekday:

- Most melacha (work) is permitted if needed
- Many people don't work unless it involves loss of income
- Haircuts are not allowed
- Shaving is only allowed if you also shaved before Yom Tov
- Laundry is not done unless it's children's clothes or essential items
- No weddings, but funerals are allowed (though no shiva observed)
- Writing is allowed only when not done in a professional format
- Construction should be avoided unless essential and unskilled

Sukkot – Unique Laws & Customs

Sukkot celebrates the protection Hashem gave us in the desert through the **Ananei HaKavod** (Clouds of Glory). As a remembrance, we dwell outdoors in temporary huts, called **Sukkot**, for seven days.

1. Dwelling in the Sukkah (Men Obligated):

Men are commanded to eat—and ideally sleep—in the sukkah. The sukkah must have:

- At least two walls and a short third wall (there are many technical rules; ask for help if building your own),
- A roof made of **Sechach**—organic material that grew from the ground and is no longer attached (like palm branches or bamboo).

If a person is **mitzta'er** (uncomfortable)—e.g., due to rain, cold, insects, or logistical issues like being in a high-rise apartment—they are **exempt** from the sukkah. Forcing yourself to eat or sleep in a sukkah while uncomfortable misses the point of the mitzvah.

"If you're not comfortable, you're not commanded."

Travelers are also exempt. Making a “travel sukkah” to fulfill a non-required mitzvah can be unnecessary or even misguided.

2. Arba Minim – The Four Species (Men Obligated):

The Torah commands men to take and shake:

- **Lulav** (palm branch),
- **Etrog** (citron),
- **Hadasim** (myrtle),
- **Aravot** (willow). Weeping willow is fine (ignore the noise).

Women are not obligated. If they wish to do the mitzvah, it's fine, but there is no reason they must. There's also no need to spend a fortune on the set—just make sure it is kosher. Ask someone knowledgeable or buy from a trusted vendor.

Shavuot – The Holiday of the Torah

Shavuot commemorates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

There are no unique halachot for Shavuot. It is a standard Yom Tov in terms of laws and restrictions.

Customs (Not Required):

- Some stay up the first night learning Torah (Tikkun Leil Shavuot).
- Some communities eat dairy foods, but this is a custom, not law.

Unlike Sukkot or Pesach, Shavuot has no specific ritual objects or physical commandments. The emphasis is on spiritual celebration—appreciating Torah, gathering as a community, and experiencing the joy of receiving the Torah anew.

May these guidelines help you honor the sanctity of Yom Tov while enjoying its joy and beauty with clarity and peace of mind.

Wishing you a **Chag Sameach** – a joyful, meaningful, and elevated holiday experience.