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# The Centrality of Torah



By: Rabbi Rory Meyerson

The עקידת יצחק (שער סז) poses a striking and fundamental question. We celebrate the Yom Tov of שבועות with תפילה and מנהגים that reflect the giving of the תורה. Yet, the תורה itself makes no mention that מתן תורה occurred on שבועות. The תורה refers to this day as a יום בכורים. Why doesn't the תורה explicitly label this יו"ט as the celebration of מתן תורה?

He offers two answers.

First, to understand this anomaly, we must recognize the nature of a command. The עקידה writes: a commandment presupposes the existence of a Commander and the prior acceptance of His authority. To command מתן תורה's commemoration would be conceptually circular. This parallels what the רמב"ן says regarding אמונה. Telling someone who lacks אמונה that it is a מצוה to believe is inherently contradictory, as the command itself relies on the very belief they are struggling to attain. Just as אמונה cannot be commanded, celebrating the תורה cannot be commanded. It must arise organically.

Moreover, by skipping over an explicit mention of מתן תורה on שבועות, it changes the Yom Tov to an expression of our own רצון to connect to ה'. Demonstrating that our desire to be close to ה' does not need to be commanded.

Second, the עקידה writes, had the תורה tethered מתן תורה to a specific date, it would inadvertently suggest that our relationship to תורה is limited to that time. our yearly cycle of

Yomim Tovim correlate with the unique opportunities available at that time of year. In the fall, we have סוכות a time of זמן שמחתינו. In the spring, we have פסח a time of זמן חירותינו. However, the celebration of the תורה cannot be confined to a section of time! The Torah is the דעת עליון – the highest, governing wisdom, that pulses through a Yid at all times. As stated in ספר יהושע(1:8): לא ימוש ספר תורה הזה מפך והגית בו יומם ולילה – We should be discussing תורה day and night.

Consider the following משל. A person's character is comprised of many מדות. We range from חסד to גבורה, and זריזות to סבלנות, each necessitating a specific time and use. However, there is one מדה that is always active. That is דעת. The governing מדה which helps us choose which of the other מדות to use at any given time. The תורה is called "דעת עליון" – the ultimate דעת. The centrality of דעת in our מדות, is a small reflection of the ultimate focal point of our lives – תורה.

תורה is not an event to be celebrated. It is our core identity. This is why the פסוקים make no mention of מתן תורה occurring on שבועות. Celebrating the תורה cannot be confined to a single calendrical date. תורה is meant to pulsate through everything we do and through every decision we make. Each day, we should find ourselves renewed with an ever-deepening love for תורה. May we all merit to internalize this message from the עקידה and live with תורה at the center of our lives.





# TAKING MEDICATION FOR AILMENTS ON YOM TOV



By: Rabbi Chaim  
Yeshaya Freeman

On Shabbos there is a Rabbinic decree against taking medication to prevent grinding the ingredients, which is a Biblical violation of *tochein* (grinding) (Shabbos 53b). This is codified in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 328:1). Chazal were stringent due to the urgency to obtain medication, one is apt to mistakenly rationalize violating Shabbos (Rif Shabbos 24b).

The poskim discuss whether there is any distinction nowadays. Rav Chaim Naeh (Badei Hashulchan 134:6[2]) suggests that since people do not make their own medications, the decree is no longer applicable. His basis is a Tosfos in meseches Beitzah (30b s.v. *tnan*) who writes a similar idea regarding the Rabbinic decree against dancing on Shabbos to prevent one from making an instrument. Tosfos says that since nowadays people do not make their own instruments, the decree is no longer applicable. He concludes that although one should be stringent, this logic can be applied in conjunction to other leniencies to permit cases of need. However, Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim 3:53) disagrees that the violation of *tochein* is only an example, as Chazal were concerned for other violations as well, such as *hotzah* (carrying) or *bishul* (cooking) which are still applicable nowadays.

Now we can explore the halachos of medication on Yom Tov. The Gemara (Beitzah 22a) relates that Ameimar permitted applying ointment to the eye for an irritation on the second day of Yom Tov, even though it is a Rabbinic violation of *koseiv* (writing) or *tzoveya* (dying). This implies that this is prohibited on Yom Tov Rishon. This is codified in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 496:2).

The aforementioned Gemara prohibits a case involving a Rabbinic violation of *koseiv* (writing) or *tzoveya* (dying), what is the halacha regarding taking medication which is only a decree to prevent a violation? There are two approaches in the poskim. The Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 532:2), Pri Megadim (*ibid.*), Chayei Adam (klal 103:2), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (98:33) and the Mishna Berura (532:5) all prohibit medicine on Yom Tov Rishon. However, the Avnei Neizer (*shu"t* 394), Rav Shlomo Kluger (*sefer hachaim* 328) and the Tzitz Eliezer (8:15[16:2]) take a more lenient approach to permit medicine on Yom Tov Rishon in cases of needs.

There are two oppositions found in the poskim to the stringent approach. The first opposition is regarding the *melacha* of *tochein*. The Mechaber (Orach Chaim 495:2) rules that although *tochein* on Yom Tov is Biblically permitted, as it is done for *ocheil nefesh* (food preparations), nevertheless there is a Rabbinic prohibition. This was enacted to enhance the joy of Yom Tov, since *tochein* is usually done on a large scale and it is very time consuming, it would detract one from enjoying Yom Tov (Mishna Berura 495:13). Accordingly, there should not be a decree against taking medicine since it is a *gezeira legezeira* (a double decree) as *tochein* itself is a decree.

The second opposition is regarding the melachos of hotzah and bishul. Seemingly, it should be permitted based on the concept of mitoch ("since"). Since these melachos are permitted for a food-related purpose, it is likewise permitted for a non food-related purpose (Beitzah 12a). However, there are two restrictions that apply. 1.) The melachos may only be performed to fulfill Yom Tov needs (Rema, Orach Chaim 518:1). 2.) The melachos may be performed only to produce a benefit that is common to most people (Kesubos 7a). Therefore, since taking medicine for an ailment is a Yom Tov need, and is a benefit that is common to most people, it would be permitted to perform hotzah or bishul for this purpose.

The poskim offer a resolution to explain the stringent opinions. Regarding the first opposition, the Mishna Berura (495:13) cites authorities that opine that tochein is a Biblical violation on Yom Tov. Although it is done for ocheil nefesh (food preparations), the Torah only permitted melachos which are usually performed close to consumption, as opposed to tochein which is usually done in advance. Therefore, the decree against taking medicine is a single decree to prevent a Biblical violation and should be applicable on Yom Tov.

Regarding the second opposition, Rav Shlomo Zalman (Shulchan Shlomo- Refuah pg. 202) cites a debate whether medicine is considered a benefit that is common to most people. This depends on whether we look at the contents of the medicine, which are not considered a common benefit to most people, or if we look at the need to be cured, which is considered a common benefit to most people. Therefore, it is not clear if the rule of mitoch is applicable. The stringent opinions cite their source from a Tosefta (Moad Katan 2:6) that one may drink root juice on Chol Hamoad. The Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 532:2) derives from here that all medication is prohibited on Yom Tov. However, the Sfas Emes (cited in Shu"t Avnei Neizer 395) rejects this proof, since the Tosefta is discussing bitter medications which detract from simchas Yom Tov. The Avnei Nezer (ibid.) also rejects this proof, since the Tosefta is discussing medications which do not provide immediate results; therefore it is not apparent that it is for the sake of Yom Tov.

Regarding Yom Tov Sheni, the Gemara (Beitzah 22a) relates that Ameimar permitted applying ointment to the eye for an irritation on the second day of Yom Tov, even though it is a Rabbinic violation of koseiv (writing) or tzoveya (dying). This is for sure true regarding medicine which is a Rabbinic decree. This is codified in Shulchan Aruch (O.C 496:2). The Teshuras Shai (2:174) explains that Chazal permitted Rabbinic violations or decrees for medicinal purposes on Yom Tov Sheni since medical needs are considered an uncommon occurrence, and won't diminish the spirit of Yom Tov. The Betzal Hachachma (2:68[1]) argues that Chazal were strict with uncommon occurrences. He suggests that this leniency was given since medicinal treatment is usually performed privately and won't lead to diminish the spirit of Yom Tov.

However, it is important to note that there is one exception to the leniency of Yom Tov Sheni. This is on Rosh Hashana as codified in the Shulchan Aruch (O.C 496:2). The reason for this is because we are stringent to consider both days of Rosh Hashana as one big day.







# Flowers and Shavuot



By: Rabbi Moshe Botton

A common custom associated with Shavuot is the decorating of homes and synagogues with fresh flowers, plants, and greenery. This custom is very old. We already find a version of it mentioned in the words of Haman in the Targum Sheni to Esther. There he describes how the Jews celebrate Shavuot by entering their shuls and decorating them with roses and flower decorations.

Several reasons were given to this custom, and its different variations.

The Rema (O.C 494:3) writes that it is customary to spread grasses and plants in the synagogue and in homes on Shavuot. This is to remember the joy of the giving of the Torah. The Mishnah Berurah (494:10) adds that we know there were plants at Har Sinai, because the Torah says that even animals were not allowed to graze near the mountain. This implies there was grass there.

The Chida understands this to also include flowers such as roses. This fits with verses in the Shir HaShirim (4:5), where flowers and gardens are used as images of beauty and closeness.

Another explanation is brought by Rav Chaim Palagi. He writes that synagogues are decorated with roses and flowers as a reminder of the giving of the Torah. He connects this to the pasuk (Shir Hashirim 5:13) “שפתותיו שושנים נוטפות מור עובר” and to the teaching of Chazal (Shabbos 88b) that when Hashem spoke each word at Sinai, the whole world was filled with fragrance. The flowers and smell remind us that Torah was not only heard, but also experienced in a very real and uplifting way.

The Bnai Yissachar sources the custom with the following Medrash (Vayikra Rabbah 23:3): R' Azariah said in the name of R' Yehudah bar Shimon: A king had a large orchard with many trees like figs, grapes, pomegranates, and apples. Over time, the orchard became full of weeds and thorns. The king was about to destroy it, but then he saw one single rose. He smelled it and his spirit was comforted. He said that for the sake of that rose, the whole orchard is worth saving.

So too, the world was created for Torah. After many generations of sin, Hashem looked at the world and saw destruction. But He found one “rose,” which is the Jewish people. When they said “נעשה ונשמע” at Har Sinai and received the Torah, the world was renewed. For the sake of that rose, the entire world is saved.

The Pardes Yosef (Shemos 2:3) wrote a custom, to spread out plants that grow by the water. The reason being that the time when Moshe was put by the reeds in the Nile occurred on Shavuot, according to the calculation of three months from the birth of Moshe Rabenu, on the 7th of Adar.

The Mei Hashiloach writes that since the Torah is light (Torah Ohr), therefore, the custom of the kids is to cover the windows in paper flowers to diminish the sunlight from illuminating the house. Since the Torah is light so there is no longer a need for the light of the sun.

It should be noted that there is another custom of putting up trees on Shavuot, since on Shavuot Hashem judges the fruits of the trees (Magen Avraham 494:5). However, this custom of trees is less common today partly due to concerns of copying non-Jewish practices as noted by the Gr”a. It can be suggested that with roses one fulfills this custom too, since regarding the beracha of the smell they are considered trees.

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