

# In Hilchos YOM TOV

You have heard the shaylos . . .  
Now learn the issues & the opinions

## Showering on Yom Tov

A summary of the weekly Wednesday night shiur by **Rabbi Shmuel Stein** at the Miami Beach Community Kollel / To receive a copy send an email to [InHilchosShabbos@gmail.com](mailto:InHilchosShabbos@gmail.com)

As we approach the upcoming Yom Tov of *Shavuos*, one of the commonly discussed questions is whether it is permitted to take a shower on Yom Tov. In this chapter, we will review the fundamental *halachos* of Yom Tov, and how they relate to taking a hot or cold shower on Yom Tov. It must be stressed that the *halachos* regarding taking showers on Yom Tov are sensitive, complex and has many differing opinions, and one must consult his Rav for a final ruling on this issue.

### The prohibition against performing *melacha* on Yom Tov

The Torah<sup>1</sup> states that on Yom Tov "one may not perform any *melachah*." Meaning, just as on Shabbos one may not perform any of the thirty-nine *melachos*, so too on Yom Tov one may not perform any of the thirty-nine *melachos*.

### The Leniency of *Ochel Nefesh* (Food preparation)

The Torah<sup>2</sup> gives a leniency regarding performing *melacha* on Yom Tov: It states, that although performing *melacha* on Yom Tov is generally prohibited, "*melachos* that are performed for **what is eaten** by all people, may be performed on Yom Tov." For example:

- It is permissible on Yom Tov to raise the flame of a gas stove. Although making the flame bigger violates the *melacha* of *Ma'avir* (kindling a fire), it is permitted on Yom Tov, because it is done for food preparation.<sup>3</sup>
- One may cook food on Yom Tov by placing it inside an oven or on top of stovetop. Even though cooking the food involves the *melacha* of *Bishul* (cooking) it is nevertheless permissible on Yom Tov, because it is done for food preparation.<sup>4</sup>

### Performing *melacha* for other physical needs

Included in the leniency of *ochel nefesh* is not only food preparation, but any physical need.<sup>5</sup> For example, the *Shulchan Aruch*<sup>6</sup> writes that one may heat up water on Yom Tov to wash his hands and face. Since washing one's hands and face is a physical need, it is considered *ochel nefesh*, and thus it is permitted on Yom Tov.

### *Davar ha'Shavah L'chol Nefesh*: A need that is common for most people

Although the Torah allows the performance of any *melacha* for the sake of one's physical needs, it gives an important condition: it is only permitted if the physical need is common for *most people*. The Torah states,<sup>7</sup> that one may only perform *melachos* [on Yom Tov] for "what is eaten **by all people**."<sup>8</sup> If the activity is something that most people do not consider a commonplace necessity, one may not perform a *melacha*. For example, the *Gemara*<sup>9</sup> writes that one may not burn incense on Yom Tov to produce a pleasant smell, because burning incense involves the *melacha* of *Ma'avir* (kindling a fire). Although producing a pleasant smell is technically considered *ochel nefesh*,<sup>10</sup> since most people do not consider burning incense a commonplace necessity, it is not considered a *davar ha'shavah l'chol nefesh*, and therefore may not be performed on Yom Tov.

### Showering and Bathing on Yom Tov

The *Shulchan Aruch*<sup>11</sup> discusses whether it is permissible to heat up water on Yom Tov for a hot bath. Since heating up water involves the *melacha* of *Bishul* (cooking), it is permitted on Yom Tov only for a need that is considered a *davar ha'shavah l'chol nefesh*. Is washing one's body something that is considered *shavah l'chol nefesh*? The *Shulchan Aruch* rules that this would depend how much of his body one wishes to wash. "If one wishes to wash only his hands [feet and face]<sup>12</sup>, it is permitted to heat up the water." Since most people consider washing these parts of a person's body to be a commonplace need it is considered a *davar ha'shavah l'chol nefesh*.<sup>13</sup> "However, if one wishes to wash his **entire body** it is prohibited to heat up the water – even if he washes one limb at a time." Since most people do not consider washing one's *entire body* to be a commonplace need it is not considered a *davar ha'shavah l'chol nefesh*.<sup>14</sup>

Accordingly, based on this ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch*, it would seem difficult to permit taking a hot shower or bath on Yom Tov, as the *Shulchan Aruch* rules explicitly that bathing one's entire body is not considered a *davar ha'shavah l'chol nefesh*. Therefore, heating up water on Yom Tov to take a shower or bath violates the *melacha d'Oraisa* of *Bishul*.<sup>15</sup>

### Possible leniencies regarding taking a shower on Yom Tov

The *poskim* discuss several possible leniencies which may permit at least some form of showering on Yom Tov. It is important to stress, that the following discussion is meant to serve strictly as a review of the different opinions on this issue and should not be relied upon without first consulting with one's Rav.

#### 1) Is taking a shower nowadays considered a *davar ha'shavah l'chol nefesh*?

The *poskim* discuss whether taking showers nowadays can be considered something which is a *davar ha'shavah l'chol nefesh*. Since nowadays every home has a shower, and many people are careful to take showers every day, perhaps we can consider taking a shower a commonplace necessity, and therefore heating up water for a hot shower may be permitted on Yom Tov.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, some *poskim*<sup>18</sup> rule that taking showers nowadays has become a common physical need and may be considered a *davar ha'shavah l'chol nefesh*.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, these *poskim* permit taking a hot shower on Yom Tov even though doing so will cause water to be cooked, since taking a shower nowadays has become a *davar ha'shavah l'chol nefesh*.<sup>20</sup>

However, the majority of prominent *poskim*<sup>21</sup> do not accept this argument. They rule that since the *Shulchan Aruch* explicitly ruled that, one may not heat up water on Yom Tov to wash one's entire body, it is difficult to alter his ruling even if societal norms have changed.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, although nowadays it is commonplace for people take showers daily, it is not certain that it has become a commonplace *need*.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, we cannot conclude that taking showers has become a *davar ha'shavah l'chol nefesh*, and as a result, according to the majority of *poskim* it is prohibited to wash one's entire body in a hot shower on Yom Tov.<sup>24</sup>

1 Shemos 21:16 2 ibid 3 Mishnah Beitza 33a; see Mishna Berura 518:1 4 See Shulchan Aruch 503:1 5 Based on the opinion of the *Rashba* (*Avodas ha'kodesh* 3:5). However, the Ran (Beitza 21a) argues that any physical need, other than for actual food preparations, is permitted on Yom Tov only due to the principle of *mi'toch she'hutra l'tzorech (ochel nefesh) hutra nami she'lo l'tzorech (ochel nefesh)*. 6 Shulchan Aruch 511:2 7 Shemos 21:16 8 Rav Yisroel Yakov Fischer (Halichos Even Yisroel p.262) writes that it does not need to be common for all people, so long as it is common for most people it is considered "common for all people." The *Levush* (511:1) and *Pri Megadim* (511:1) write this as well. 9 Kesubos 7a 10 based on the principle of *mi'toch she'hutra l'tzorech (ochel nefesh) hutra nami she'lo l'tzorech (ochel nefesh)*. 11 Shulchan Aruch 511:2 12 Mishna Berura 511:9 13 Mishna Berura 511:9 14 Mishna Berura 511:9. The Rema (511:2) rules that it is even prohibited to ask a non-Jew to heat up the water. However, since nowadays the way water is heated up is only through a *davar sheino miskaven*, as after water is removed from the tank additional water enters the tank and is cooked (see next note), it may be permitted because *Amira l'akum* is permitted regarding a *davar sheino miskaven* (even when it is a *p'sik reisha*) [See The Laws of Yom Tov p. 211] 15 When one takes a shower or bath he removes hot water from the tank and automatically, albeit inadvertently, causes additional water to enter the tank and get cooked (See *Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchaso* 1:45; *Orchos Shabbos* 1:99; *Nishmas Shabbos* 4:69) 17 See *Nishmas Avraham* (511, note 1) who also addresses this issue. See there where he also discusses smoking on Yom Tov. 18 Opinion of the CRC. See Shulchan Shlomo (Yom Tov, 511, note 3) where Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach is quoted to have permit this. However, Rabbi Shmuel Fuerst states that he himself asked Rav Shlomo Zalman regarding taking showers on Yom Tov, and Rav Shlomo Zalman ruled that one should not follow this leniency; see note 21. 19 This is particularly understandable on a "third-day" of Yom Tov in hot and humid places, one may consider taking a shower on Yom Tov a common need for most people. See Rivivos Ephraim 6:265 quoting from *sefer Mayim Chaim* (1:29) 20 Even according to these lenient opinions there is an additional concern with taking a shower on Yom Tov. As we will later discuss, there is a time-honored Ashkenazi custom not to immerse one's entire body in water lest this lead to wringing one's hair. Accordingly, one may only wash his entire body only in a case of discomfort (where this custom is waived regarding taking a shower) We will also discuss other issues that must be addressed when taking a shower on Yom Tov (i.e., using shampoo, drying oneself after a shower).] 21 Rav Elyashiv (quoted in *Avei Yushfei* 3:55); Rav Yisroel Yaakov Fisher (quoted by Rav Shmuel Fuerst); Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach (although Rav Shlomo Zalman is unsure in *Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchaso* pg. 188 note 21, Rav Shmuel Fuerst states that he himself asked Rav Shlomo Zalman regarding taking showers on Yom Tov and Rav Shlomo Zalman ruled that one should not follow this leniency); Rav Yisroel Belsky (quoted in *Halachically Speaking* 3, p. 385); Rav Shlomo Miller (*Debritener Rav* writes (Be'er Moshe 8:159) "The rulings of *Chazal* do not change, and it is forbidden to look for ways to avoid them. I personally do not even want to think about any leniencies regarding taking a hot shower on Yom Tov. If someone is desperate to take a shower, he should turn to a competent *Posek* who can guide him through the ways of the Torah." 23 See Rivivos Ephraim 6:265, and Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen (Yom Tov, pg. 204 note 2) 24 Bathing infants or children. The Rema (511:2) writes that prohibition of heating up water applies to infants and children as

## 2) Washing only part of one's body

As we mentioned earlier, although the *Shulchan Aruch*<sup>25</sup> prohibits washing one's entire body with hot water on Yom Tov, he does permit warming up water on Yom Tov to wash one's hands, feet, and face. Washing these minimal areas is considered a commonplace physical need and is therefore considered a *davar ha'shaveh l'chol nefesh*.<sup>26</sup>

The *Biur Halacha*<sup>27</sup> cites a dispute regarding whether this ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch* is limited to these specific minimal areas of one's body (i.e., one's hands, feet, and face), or it is permitted to wash any minimal area of his body (i.e., less than 50% of his body). The *Biur Halacha* concludes, that one may be lenient on this issue, and so long as only a minority of one's body is washed it is considered a *davar ha'shaveh l'chol nefesh*. Accordingly, one may take a hot shower on Yom Tov, so long as he is careful to only wash a minority (less than 50%) of his body.<sup>28</sup>

**The concern of the Mishna Berura.** Although this leniency would seem to be a practical way to wash up over Yom Tov, the *Mishnah Berura*<sup>29</sup> cites the *Bais Yosef* who raises a concern with this leniency: If one were to wash part of his body in the shower or bath, there is a strong concern that he may inadvertently wash the rest of his body as well. Therefore, it is prohibited to wash even part of one's body when this concern is present. However, there are a couple of ways to avoid this concern and permit washing a minimal part of one's body:

**a. He is wearing clothes on the rest of his body.** One may wash a minimal part of his body if the rest of his body is covered.<sup>30</sup> When one is wearing clothing on the rest of his body there is no longer a concern that he will inadvertently wash his entire body.

**b. The rest of his body is outside the shower.** One may wash a minimal part of his body if only part of his body is inside the shower.<sup>31</sup> Since only part of his body is inside the shower, there is no concern that he will inadvertently wash the rest of his body which is outside the shower.

## 3) Showering with cold water

Another possible way to take a shower on Yom Tov, is by taking a cold shower. Showering with cold water obviously does not involve the *melacha* of *Bishul* on Yom Tov, since there is no cooking involved when using cold water. Nevertheless, the *Mishnah Berura*<sup>32</sup> writes that there is a time-honored custom among the Ashkenazim not to immerse oneself into cold water on Shabbos [or Yom Tov]. There are several reasons why this custom was established. One reason is due to the concern that immersing one's entire body in water may lead someone to inadvertently squeeze water out of his hair, violating the prohibition of *s'chitas se'ar* (squeezing one's hair).

Accordingly, based on this time-honored custom taking even a cold shower on Yom Tov would seem to be prohibited. Nevertheless, Rav Moshe Feinstein<sup>33</sup> rules that in cases of discomfort (e.g., one is perspiring heavily<sup>34</sup>) one may be lenient and take a cold shower on Shabbos or Yom Tov.<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, someone who is uncomfortable he may wash his entire body in a cold shower on Yom Tov.

### To summarize

Taking a shower on Yom Tov is a complex issue that can possibly involve the *melacha d'Oraisa* of *Bishul* on Yom Tov. The *poskim* discuss several possible ways that one may take a shower on Yom Tov to relieve some level of discomfort:

1) Some *poskim* argue that nowadays taking a shower is considered a *davar ha'shaveh l'chol nefesh*, and therefore one may take even a hot shower on Yom Tov. However, the majority of *poskim* do not agree with this leniency.

2) One may wash a minimal area (less than 50%) of his body with hot water, as this can be considered a *davar ha'shaveh l'chol nefesh*. However, one may not completely enter the shower due to the concern that he may inadvertently wash his entire body.

3) One may take a cold shower on Yom Tov to wash his entire body to relieve pain and discomfort.

## Additional concerns with taking a shower on Yom Tov

When taking a shower on Yom Tov, using one of the permissible methods discussed above, there are several other concerns that one must be careful to avoid:

**1. Using soap.** One may not use a *bar of soap* on Shabbos or Yom Tov due to the *melacha* of *Memareiach* (Smoothing).<sup>36</sup> When a bar of soap is used, the bar is smoothed out, and is therefore prohibited under the *melacha* of *Memareiach*. However, many *poskim*<sup>37</sup> permit using *liquid soap* on Shabbos or Yom Tov. Since the liquid soap consists of a loose and liquid consistency that does not hold a form, smoothing it does not violate the *melacha* of *Memareiach*. However, Rav Moshe Feinstein<sup>38</sup> ruled that using liquid soap also violates the *melacha* of *Memareiach* because it has a viscous consistency and does not pour easily. Later we will discuss using shampoo on Yom Tov.

**2. Squeezing water out of a garment.** It is prohibited to squeeze water out of a garment on Shabbos or Yom Tov, as doing so violates the *melachos*, *Melabain* (laundering) and *Dosh* (extracting).<sup>39</sup> For example, one may not use a bath brush or sponge to lather oneself with soap, since doing so will inadvertently extract water and soap from the brush.<sup>40</sup>

**3. Squeezing wet hair.** The *Beis Yosef*<sup>41</sup> rules that it is rabbinically prohibited to squeeze water out of one's hair on Shabbos or Yom Tov. Squeezing water out of one's hair resembles squeezing water out of a garment, and therefore *Chazal* forbade it under the prohibition called *s'chitas se'ar* (wringing one's hair). For example,

- One may not wring his hair after taking a shower.<sup>42</sup>
- It is prohibited to lather shampoo into one's hair while taking a shower, since doing so will indelibly extract water and soap from his hair.

However, one may pour shampoo directly onto his hair and allow the water from the shower to rinse his hair. Since he is not actively squeezing out his hair, doing so does not involve the prohibition of *s'chitas se'ar*.<sup>43</sup>

**4. Drying one's hair with a towel.** Drying one's hair with a towel may involve the prohibition of *s'chitas se'ar*, because as he dries his hair, he extracts water from his hair. There are several opinions among the *poskim* regarding using a towel to dry one's hair on Shabbos or Yom Tov:

1 – Some *poskim*<sup>44</sup> rule that it is prohibited to dry one's hair with a towel on Shabbos or Yom Tov, because this will inevitably squeeze water out of one's hair. According to these *poskim*, after taking a shower, one must allow his hair to dry on its own.

2 – Other *poskim*<sup>45</sup> rule that based on several halachic factors one may dry his hair with a towel on Shabbos or Yom Tov. One of the reasons given is that since the water gets absorbed *directly* into the towel and it is not noticeable that water is squeezed out of his hair, it does not resemble squeezing a garment and is therefore permitted.

3 – Others<sup>46</sup> give a middle opinion, they rule that although one may not use a towel vigorously to dry his hair, one may place a towel gently on top of his hair. Since this only causes the towel to absorb the water that is resting *on top* of one's hair and not the water that is absorbed within his hair, the prohibition of *s'chitas se'ar* is not violated.

Drying one's body with a towel does not pose any halachic issue. Since the hair on one's body are spread apart and water is not trapped between the hairs, they may be dried with a towel.<sup>47</sup> One does not need to be concerned while drying his body he will inadvertently squeeze water out of the towel, because any water which is squeezed out is unintentional (*davar sh'eino miskavein*) and is permitted.<sup>48</sup>

The intention of this summary is to discuss common practical *shaylos*. One should consult a Rav concerning *p'sak halacha*.

well, as it is not considered a *davar ha'shaveh l'chol nefesh*. However, the Rema writes that there is a leniency that applied to bathing young children that does not apply to adults. One may use water that was heated on Yom Tov for a permissible purpose (e.g., it was cooked for drinking purposes) to wash a young child on Yom Tov. However, this leniency applies only if one is accustomed to bathing the child every day, but if the child is only bathed every second or third day one may not bathe the child even with water that was heated in a permissible manner (Mishna Berura 511:12). See the Laws of Yom Tov (Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen p. 206,207) 25 Shulchan Aruch 511:2 26 Mishna Berura 511:9 27 511:2 *d'h aval lo* 28 Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen (Yom Tov, pg. 206); heard from Rav Shmuel Fuerst (see also Shabbos Shlomo 18:9, note 15). 29 511:9 30 Hilchos ha'Moadim 15 *ha'arah* 6; Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen (Yom Tov, pg. 206) 31 In a conversation with Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen; Halachically Speaking 3, pg. 386 32 326:21 33 Igros Moshe 4:74, *Richitza* 3 34 The laws of Yom Tov (Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen) p. 205 35 Rav Moshe writes that since it is unclear whether this time-honored custom included only immersing oneself in a body of cold water (e.g., a river, or bath) or even taking a shower, one may be lenient in cases of discomfort. 36 Mishna Berura 326:30 37 *Shmiras Shabbos k'hilchaso* 14:18, *Moer ha'Shabbos* (1:532) quoting Rav Yisroel Yaakov Fischer, *Be'er Moshe* 5:87 38 Igros Moshe O.C. 1:113 39 Shulchan Aruch 320:18 40 *Shmiras Shabbos k'hilchaso* 14:13; Chut Shani 2, p. 62 41 Y.D. 199; see *Orchos Shabbos* Vol. 1, pg. 404 42 *Orchos Shabbos* 13:49,50; see *Nishmas Shabbos* 4:260 43 In a conversation with Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen 44 Cited in *Orchos Shabbos* 13:51; Rav Chaim Kanievski (*Orchos Yosher* p. 41); see *Nishmas Shabbos* 4:260-2. 45 Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach cited in Shulchan Shlomo 326:10:3, *Shmiras Shabbos k'hilchaso* 12: *ha'arah* 64, and in *Orchos Shabbos* 13:51, note 89 46 *Ketzos Hashulchan* from Ben Ish Chai (Shana 2, parshas pekudei) and Rav Elyashiv cited in *Orchos Shabbos* 13:51, note 89; Rav Shlomo Miller (*Shabbos Shlomo* 18:6, note 8) 47 *Toras Shabbos* (326:3); Beer Moshe 2:29. The *Nishmas Shabbos* (4:261) writes that one may use a towel to dry one's eyebrows or mustache since these hairs are spread apart from each other. However, the *Nishmas Shabbos* (4:268) writes that there is room to be stringent regarding drying areas of one's body that has a lot of hair close together (e.g., underarms), because water may be considered trapped there. The *Nishmas Shabbos* (*ibid*) adds that although some people are stringent and do not use a towel to dry their body on Shabbos (even though they would typically do so during the week after immersing in a *mikveh*), this seems to be an excessive stringency. 48 see 39 *Melochos* p. 350; as this would be similar to using a towel to clean up a spill where one does not need to be considered that doing so will inadvertently wring water from the towel.