



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 11 | Bo| Sichah 1

Permitted for Yom Tov

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1.

LABORIOUS WORK

Regarding the Festival of Pesach, the Torah says in our *parshah*:¹

The first day shall be a sacred occasion.... All work² may not be done on them. You may only do the work needed to enable a person³ to eat.

Put differently, performing work on Yom Tov⁴ (as on Shabbos) is prohibited, except for *work that is required to prepare food for consumption*.⁵ Such work is permitted.

The Torah repeats the prohibition against working on Yom Tov several times,⁶ whenever a particular Yom Tov is discussed. In all of these other instances, however, it says, “You shall not do any **laborious** work,” without Scripture explicitly permitting food-related work.

We need to appreciate the reason for these differences.

Regarding this issue, *Ramban* writes:⁷

“Laborious work,” מלאכת עבודה, means any work that is not food-related. In the following verses, “labor,” עבודה, has a similar connotation: “Six days you shall labor and accomplish all your work,⁸ and with all labor in the field;⁹ and you {the mountains of Israel} will be tilled and sown....”¹⁰ {All these expressions of labor describe work that is essentially an act of *labor* rather than an act to confer ‘pleasure.’¹¹} Food-related work, however, is

¹ *Shemos* 12:16.

² {“Work,” in the context of Shabbos and Festival observance, encompasses distinct activities, not linked with the degree of effort required to carry them out. See <https://www.chabad.org/102032> for elucidation.}

³ {In the Hebrew original, “*lechol nefesh*”; lit. “for any soul.”}

⁴ {Festival.}

⁵ {A close translation of the Hebrew original. For the remainder of this essay, however, the Hebrew phrase has been abbreviated as “food-related work.” Examples of such work would be cooking, baking, kneading, etc.}

⁶ *Vayikra* 23:7, 8, 21, 25, 35, 36; *Bamidbar* 28:18, 25, 26; 29:1, 12, 35.

⁷ *Vayikra* 23:7.

⁸ *Shemos* 20:9.

⁹ *Ibid.* 1:14.

¹⁰ *Yechezkel* 36:9.

¹¹ {“Pleasure,” in the context of this discussion, refers specifically to the pleasure from eating.}

{fundamentally} **work of pleasure and not laborious work.** {This explanation of *laborious work* emerges clearly from the Torah’s phraseology.} Regarding the Festival of *Matzos* {Pesach}, the Torah states initially, *all work shall not be done on them.*¹² Therefore, Scripture has to specify {immediately afterward in this verse}, *You may only do the work needed to enable a person to eat.* But regarding all the other festival days, Scripture states succinctly, *You shall not do all laborious work.* This wording prohibits all work that is *not* food-related, implying that food-related work *is* permitted on {those days}. Scripture never states regarding any of the other festival days, “**all work** {shall not be done}.” Nor does it specify that food-related work is permitted because the term “**laborious work**” teaches all this. [...] But because Scripture mentions there (regarding the Festival of *Matzos*) “*all work*,” it had to qualify this prohibition immediately afterward — *You may only do the work needed to enable a person to eat.*

What emerges from *Ramban’s* commentary is that on Yom Tov, the Torah only prohibits performing “**laborious work.**” This term {“laborious work”} itself teaches us that food-related work, to begin with, was never forbidden, since “laborious work” does not include food-related work.

2.

INTRINSICALLY PERMITTED – OR NOT?

This leniency — permitting food-related work during Yom Tov — can be explained in two ways:

- a) Even food-related work is prohibited **intrinsically**, since such work also falls under the ambit of, “**All** work may not be done on them.” However, when work is food-related, the Torah excludes it from {the generality of the phrase} “all work.” In other words, the need to prepare the food is the reason and cause for permitting such work.

¹² *Shemos* 12:16.

b) As *Ramban*, from his commentary quoted above, appears to maintain, *food-related* work was never included in the prohibition to perform work {on Yom Tov}. The verse, “You may only do the work needed to enable a person to eat,” is stated to teach that the prohibition, “All work may not be done on them,” should be interpreted to encompass only *non*-food-related work. Put differently, the biblical phrase, “work needed to enable a person to eat” identifies and delineates the type of work to which the prohibition does not apply.

A practical halachic difference between the two aforementioned approaches:¹³ If a person is fasting on Yom Tov,¹⁴ is he permitted biblically to do food-related work? According to the rationale (that such work is inherently forbidden, but) that the Torah permits such work **because** of food-related reasons, understandably, this permission is conferred only to someone who eats during the Yom Tov. Someone who is fasting on Yom Tov, however, may not perform food-related work since *for him* such work is, in fact, not a food-related need; relative to this individual, this work remains prohibited. In contrast, according to the rationale that food-related work on festivals was never prohibited to begin with, a fasting person is also permitted to do such work.

Apparently, this {i.e., the conundrum as to which rationale above is decisive} is the subject of an argument between Beis¹⁵ Shamai and Beis Hillel in tractate *Beitzah*:¹⁶ “Beis Shamai avers that on Yom Tov, a person may not carry an infant, etc.,¹⁷ into the public domain; Beis Hillel permits one to do so.” The *Gemara* explains that their dispute is based on whether or not it is reasonable to say, “Since the work was permitted {by the Torah} when needed (for the sake of eating), it was permitted (also) when not needed.”

We can explain simply as follows: Beis Hillel maintains that the phrase, “only do the work needed to enable a person to eat” removes, *ab initio*,

¹³ {...to explain the grounds for permitting food-related work.}

¹⁴ *Rama* (“*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 528, par. 20) and Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, *ibid.*, par. 30, write that a fasting person is prohibited to perform food-related work on Yom Tov. However, these sources do not indicate whether this prohibition is biblical or rabbinic.

¹⁵ {Literally, *beis* means “the house of.” In talmudic parlance, this term refers to a rabbinic academy.}

¹⁶ *Beitzah* 12a.

¹⁷ {or a *lulav* or a Torah scroll.}

food-related work from the category of prohibited work. Accordingly, such {food-related} work is permitted even {in circumstances} when {there is no food to prepare, so} the need for this work is not food-related.¹⁸ Beis Shamai, though, maintains that the phrase, “only do the work needed to enable a person to eat” gives a **reason** to *exempt* food-related work from the prohibition. Consequently, the Torah only permits food-related work when such work is actually needed in order to prepare food for consumption. Otherwise, this work retains its prohibited status.

3.

SEEMING AMBIGUITY IN *SHULCHAN ARUCH*

In his *Shulchan Aruch*, the Alter Rebbe writes:

The first and seventh day of Pesach and the festival of Shavuos... are called *Yamim Tovim* {Festival Days}. Anyone performing laborious work on one of these days incurs a biblical {penalty of} flogging, as it says, “You shall not do any laborious work.” What constitutes “laborious work”? Any work that is not done with food or drink... However, all work that is done with food or drink... all such work is called... food-related work, which the Torah rendered permissible for the purpose of eating on Yom Tov. As it says, “You may only do the work needed to enable a person to eat.”

Now the Alter Rebbe’s wording in the earlier part {of this clause}, “What constitutes ‘laborious work’? Any work that is not done with food or drink” implies (in consonance with the opinion of *Ramban*) that “laborious work” by definition means non-food-related work. Accordingly, food-related work was {never prohibited, but} at the outset, essentially permissible. However, what the Alter Rebbe writes further {in this clause} — “food-related work, which the Torah **rendered permissible** for the purpose of eating on Yom Tov” — implies that initially, food-related work *was* included in the prohibition against work on Yom Tov, except that the Torah (in the verse under discussion) permitted

¹⁸ See at length, *supra*, Section 4, 5.

food-related work for the purpose of eating on Yom Tov. Meaning, having a food-related need is a reason to permit these such work, which otherwise would be intrinsically prohibited. Seemingly, then, what the Alter Rebbe writes is self-contradictory!

4.

CLARIFYING THE DIFFERENT OPINIONS

Concerning the opinion of Beis Hillel, “Since the work was permitted when needed, it was permitted also when not needed,” Rashi¹⁹ and *Tosfos*²⁰ disagree. Rashi explains that such work²¹ is permitted even when no need at all exists for it. That is, *biblically*, the work is completely permissible; however, *rabbinically*, it must satisfy some “slight” need. *Tosfos* maintains that the permission given for work even “when not needed” means that it is not **needed for the purpose of eating or drinking**. However, at least a ‘slight’ need, related to the day, must exist {for the work to be permitted}. Meaning, *biblically*, such work is also not permitted altogether; rather, it is only permitted if it satisfies some “slight” need related to the day.

In light of what was explained earlier (in section 2) — that Beis Hillel maintains that food-related work was, at the outset, never included in the prohibition — we can understand readily Rashi’s viewpoint that such work is *biblically* permitted even in the absence of any need at all. According to *Tosfos*, however, the following is not clear:

Since, at the outset, such work was never regarded as forbidden, mustn’t we say that such work is permitted even if it is *not* needed at all to satisfy a need related to the day?

¹⁹ *Beitza* 12a, s.v. “אלא מדלא מפליג.”

²⁰ *Beitza*, *ibid.*, s.v. “ג’ה”; et al.

²¹ {In context, Rashi and *Tosfos* are discussing *carrying* on Yom Tov.}

[{In an attempt to resolve the above question} one might propose that *Tosfos* argues with Rashi, and says that Beis Hillel maintains that a food-related need for work constitutes a **reason** to permit this work {and exempt it from the general prohibition against work on Yom Tov}. However, this supposition is impossible. For were it true, then whether some “slight” need related to the **day** existed would be irrelevant. What would matter would be only if the work actually served a food-related need, because this was the basis for granting the dispensation to perform such work, as explained above. Consequently, we must say that also according to *Tosfos*’ viewpoint, Beis Hillel maintains that food-related work constitutes {intrinsically} permissible work.]

The following is the proposed explanation of the dispute between Rashi and *Tosfos*: As explained above, according to *Ramban*, food-related work is not considered to be “laborious work,” “מלאכת עבודה.” Instead, it is considered to be “pleasurable work,” “מלאכת הנאה,” and is not included in the prohibition enjoined by the verse, “You shall not do any laborious work.” According to Rashi, the interpretation of this line of reasoning is that food-related work is **essentially** a different category of work whose **inherent nature** is “pleasurable work.” As such, this work doesn’t depend on the intent of the person performing it in order to change the work into “pleasurable work.” Accordingly, it is immaterial whether such work is done for the purpose of, and because of the need for, enjoyment and pleasure, or if they are done not for this purpose but rather for some other sort of need. Since the **intrinsic character** of such work is that of “pleasurable work,” from the outset it was never included in the {biblical} prohibition, “You shall not do any **laborious work**.” Therefore, such work may be performed in any event, even if not needed at all to satisfy a need related to Yom Tov.

According to *Tosofos*, food-related work, in essence, is no different than other work. Nevertheless, if performed for a person’s enjoyment on Yom Tov (in order to eat, or for some other enjoyment-need of the day), then such work does not fall under the rubric of the prohibition against “laborious work.” However, if not performed to satisfy a need of the day, then such work does fall within the scope of “laborious work” forbidden on Yom Tov. For this reason, *Tosofos*

maintains that to be permitted, there must be at least a “slight” need for it, related to the day.

Put a little differently:²²

Rashi maintains that with the verse, “You may only do the work needed to enable a person to eat,” the Torah places such work in a distinct category (“pleasurable work”). Such forms of work are defined as such intrinsically, and because of the **mechanics** of their execution.²³

Tosfos maintains that with the verse, “You may only do the work needed to enable a person to eat,” the Torah categorizes such work according to its purpose and to the **intention** of the one performing the work. When done to bring enjoyment to a person, such work becomes “pleasurable work.” As such, this work is not included in the general term, “laborious work.”

In light of this explanation, we may posit that *Tosfos* also understands Beis Hillel as maintaining that {the attribute of} being food-related serves a **sign** delineating the type of work *not* included in the prohibition against “laborious work.” [On this basis, the difficulty identified in the Alter Rebbe’s wording becomes even greater, as discussed above in section 3.]

5.

EVEN FOR A *SLIGHT* NEED

Nevertheless, we can also explain *Tosfos* differently. Possibly, *Tosfos* understands Beis Hillel as maintaining that being food-related serves a **reason** why such work is **rendered permissible**, even though it is **intrinsically prohibited**. *How* this dispensation works, however, is different as *Tosfos* understands Beis Hillel: Beis Hillel does not mean that when work is food-related, the prohibition for such work is **overridden**. (Meaning, it’s not

²² {Lit., “[expressing the same aforementioned explanation] in a different (scholarly) style.”}

²³ {In the more abstract Hebrew original, “*mitzad atzmam, ve’gufpe’ulasan.*”}

that fulfilling this need supersedes the prohibition of doing work on Yom Tov, and consequently, such work is not rendered permissible unless its **need** is **purely** food-related.) Rather, when there is a food-related need, such work becomes completely **permissible**. Therefore, one needn't restrict doing food-related work only for food required for consumption on that day.²⁴ Similarly, it is permissible to slaughter²⁵ an animal even if no more than an olive's size amount of meat is needed.²⁶ Since this work satisfies some food-related need, the work becomes **permitted** completely. This is true even when some of the work, or the majority of it, is not performed for this purpose.

By applying the above reasoning, we can also explain the viewpoint of Beis Hillel that the Torah also **permits** this type of work when performed for the purpose of deriving other types of enjoyment {on Yom Tov}.

The explanation: The work that is (permitted when) performed to satisfy pleasure-related needs, other than pleasure from eating, shares a common denominator with the work that is performed to satisfy food-related needs. Namely, both types of work are performed to satisfy a *person's* needs. Therefore, these other {pleasure-related} needs, at a minimum, are considered to be "slight" needs in comparison to food-related needs. And since we see that food-related work is also permitted in instances where there is actually only a slight food-related need, similarly, it suffices for there to be a pleasure-related need {to permit the necessary work} because a pleasure-related need is (qualitatively) "slight" relative to food-related needs.

Thus, this is how the opinion of Beis Hillel is to be interpreted: "Since the work was permitted {by the Torah} when needed {for the sake of eating}..." — since for food-related needs, such work was **permitted**, i.e., the essential character of this form of work was permitted — ... permission was given {also} for the rest of the "unneeded work," besides the work that is "slightly" needed. It makes no difference whether that "slight" need is actually food-related, or

²⁴ *Beitzah* 17a; *Mishneh Torah*, "Hilchos Yom Tov," ch. 1, par. 10; *Shulchan Aruch*, "Orach Chaim" {ch. 507, par. 6}; ch. 512, par. 1, 3.

²⁵ {ritually.}

²⁶ *Beitzah* 25a; *Mishneh Torah*, "Hilchos Yom Tov," ch. 1, par. 12; *Shulchan Aruch*, "Orach Chaim," ch. 503, par. 1.

whether the need is one that has a commonality to a food-related need {i.e., a pleasure-related need}, since the {latter} need is regarded as being (in substance, and in quality) a “slight” need relative to a food-related need.

Therefore, *Tosfos* maintains that permission for work was given by Beis Hillel only in a situation where the work satisfies a “slight” need related to the {Yom Tov} day.

6.

RESOLVING THE PARADOX IN *SHULCHAN ARUCH*

Based on what was explained above — that Beis Hillel also maintains that the verse, “You may only do the work... to eat,” provides a reason to render food-related work permissible — we can posit that the Alter Rebbe also subscribes to this view. Doing so allows us to elucidate what he writes in his *Shulchan Aruch*. But first we need to preface by sorting out a confusing question:

In our *parshah*, why does Scripture choose the wording, “**All work** may not be done on them,” which requires Scripture to then **exposit** the permissibility of doing food-related work? Shouldn’t Scripture rather have written, “Any **laborious work**...”? Had it done so, we would have automatically understood that food-related work, which is “pleasurable work” {and not “laborious” work} was, at the outset, not included in the prohibition?

The explanation: In our *parshah*, the Torah mentions **for the first time** the prohibition against doing work on Yom Tov. That is why Scripture specifically writes (not, “You shall not do any **laborious** work on them,” which would have implied that food-related work — pleasurable work — was even initially not prohibited, but rather), “All work (unqualified) may not be done on them.” This verse **teaches** us that **all** work is {intrinsically} **forbidden** on Yom Tov. But then Scripture adds, “You may only do the work needed to enable a person to eat.” This teaches us that by **reason** of the work enabling a person to eat, the Torah **renders** such work **permissible**. In *parshas Emor (et al)*,

Scripture says summarily, “You shall not do any **laborious** work,” since there is no room to mistakenly believe that food-related work was never essentially forbidden (as *Ramban* explains). For the first time Scripture warned us against doing work on Yom Tov, it already noted that these forms of {food-related} work were also intrinsically forbidden (and were only permitted for the **reason** that they satisfy food-related needs).

Now in *Shulchan Aruch*,²⁷ the Alter Rebbe codifies the prohibition against doing work on **all** of the festivals. He, therefore, cites the verse found in the Torah’s discussion of all the festivals: “Anyone performing laborious work... incurs biblical flogging..., as it says, ‘You shall not do any laborious work.’” He then proceeds to add an explanation as to what constitutes *laborious work*: “Any work that is not done with food or drink...” Thus, the cited verse speaks about only laborious work and **does not address** the rule governing the permissibility of work performed to satisfy food-related needs. Afterward, the Alter Rebbe goes on to explain the law concerning food-related work and its biblical source. He writes: “However, all work that is done with food... all such work is called... food-related work, which the Torah has rendered **permissible**..., as it says, ‘You may do *only* the work needed to enable a person to eat” (and as stated,²⁸ “*only*, 7א” — implies that this work is excluded and removed (from the general prohibition), and is — “permissible”).

7.

YOM TOV EVERY DAY

The lesson to be applied in our divine service:

The Torah’s **allowance** of prohibited work on Yom Tov for the purpose of eating on Yom Tov shows us to what extent *simchas* Yom Tov is crucial on the festivals, as it says,²⁹ “festivals for rejoicing.”

²⁷ {“*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 495, par. 1-2.}

²⁸ {Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*; et al}

²⁹ Liturgy of {*Shemona Esrei*} the *Shalosh Regalim*.

As known, a glimmer from the light of the festivals glows every day. Since *simcha* is fundamental to Yom Tov, as explained, it makes sense that a person also needs to experience the joy of Yom Tov every day of the year. So in addition to the joy we feel **while** fulfilling a *mitzvah*³⁰ — “*simcha* of a *mitzvah*” — we are gladdened by the radiant light of the *Yomim Tovim* during the course of the entire day.

– From talks given on the 2nd day of Sukkos, and on Shabbos Chol Hamoed
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³⁰ See *Mishneh Torah*, end of “*Hilchos Lulav*”; *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 1, p. 228 ff.