

SHE'AILOS U'TESHUVOS

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

QUESTION: Is it permitted to move plants or flowerpots on Shabbos?

DISCUSSION: In halachic terms, all potted plants are considered to be "nourished from the ground(1)" and consequently "connected" to the ground and forbidden to be moved or lifted on Shabbos. Regardless of whether the pot has a hole in its base, is indoors(2) or outdoors - it is classified as severe muktzeh and may not be moved for any purpose on Shabbos(3). It is permissible, however, to smell, touch and even bend the stem or the leaves, provided that they are soft and flexible and would not break upon contact(4).

It is strictly forbidden to move a plant or a flowerpot from a shady area to a sunny area so that exposure to the sun's rays will aid its growth. It is also prohibited to open a window or to pull up a shade with the specific intention of allowing the sun or air to aid a plant's growth. Conversely, if sunlight or fresh air is detrimental to a plant, it would be prohibited to shut them out, since shutting them out promotes the plant's growth(5).

QUESTION: What about flowers - may they be moved, smelled or touched on Shabbos?

DISCUSSION: Flowers, while still connected to the ground, may be smelled and touched, provided that their stems are soft and do not normally become brittle(6).

Flowers in a vase may be moved on Shabbos(7). They may not, however, be moved from a shady area to a sunny area to promote blossoming. If the buds have not fully bloomed, the vase may be moved but just slightly, since the movement of the water hastens the opening of the buds (8).

One may remove flowers from a vase full of water, as long as they have not sprouted roots in the water(9). Once removed, they may not be put back in the water if that will cause further blossoming.

Water may not be added to a flower vase on Shabbos(10). On Yom Tov, however, water may be added but not changed(11).

Flowers should be placed in water before Shabbos. In case they were not, they may not be placed in water on Shabbos if the buds have not blossomed fully. If the buds are completely opened, however, some poskim permit placing them in water on Shabbos(12).

One may not gather flowers or create an arrangement and place it in a vase on Shabbos, even if the vase contains no water(13).

QUESTION: Are there any Shabbos restrictions concerning grass?

DISCUSSION: Touching, moving, walking, running, or lying on grass is permissible¹⁴. Some poskim¹⁵ prohibit running in high grass if it would definitely result in some grass being uprooted, while other poskim are not concerned with this possibility¹⁶.

Grass which was uprooted on Shabbos and gets stuck on one's shoes is considered muktzeh, since it was attached to the earth when Shabbos began. One may remove it only in an indirect manner¹⁷.

QUESTION: Must Birchos ha-Shachar be recited before davening or may they be temporarily skipped?

DISCUSSION: The Shulchan Aruch¹⁸ states that one who arrives late for Shacharis may skip parts of Pesukei d'Zimrah if otherwise he would not be able to daven Shemoneh Esrei with the tzibur. There is no clear discussion, however, concerning the Birchos ha-Shachar: May they be temporarily skipped or must they be recited before davening?

The answer depends on which of the Birchos ha-Shachar we are discussing:

The blessing of Al netilas yadayim must be said before davening. If one forgot to say it before davening he cannot say it after davening¹⁹. Asher yatzar should also be said before davening, since it should be said immediately after one has relieved himself²⁰.

Elokai neshamah should be said before davening, since some poskim maintain that after one has recited Shemoneh Esrei, he may no longer recite this blessing²¹. If one forgot to say Elokai neshamah and remembered during Pesukei d'Zimrah, he should recite it right then and there²². If he remembered before saying the blessing of Mechayeh ha-meisim, he should have specific intention that he does not want the blessing of Mechayeh ha-meisim to substitute for Elokai neshamah [since their content is similar]²³.

Birchos ha-Torah should be said before davening, since according to many poskim, the verses which are said in Pesukei d'zimrah should be preceded by Birchos ha-Torah²⁴. If one forgot to recite Birchos ha-Torah before davening, he may say them [and the accompanying pesukim] during Pesukei d'Zimrah²⁵. If one did not remember that he forgot Birchos ha-Torah until he is in the middle of Birchos Kerias Shema, then he should have in mind, while saying the blessing of Ahavah rabbah, to fulfill the obligation of Birchos ha-Torah²⁶. He must learn something after Shemoneh Esrei.

All other Birchos ha-Shachar may be said after davening. Consequently, if saying them first would cause one to miss tefillah b'tzibur, he should wait till after davening to recite them - provided that he is sure that he will not forget to say them after davening.

Sometimes, though, one is faced with a choice. Since, as we just explained, most of the Birchos ha-Shachar may be recited after davening, the question arises as to what is the better choice when

coming late for davening: Is it better to skip parts of Pesukei d'Zimrah or is it better to skip the Birchos ha-Shachar [those that may be said after davening]? Several poskim(27) rule that saying Birchos ha-Shachar before davening is preferable to saying the entire Pesukei d'Zimrah. This ruling is based on the fact that the Birchos ha-Shachar are mentioned in the Talmud(28), while the parts of Pesukei d'Zimrah that one is allowed to omit if necessary, are not. In addition, Birchos ha-Shachar were originally supposed to be said immediately upon arising and getting dressed(29). Nowadays, we say them in shul, but we should not further delay them. Other poskim(30) maintain that Pesukei d'Zimrah take precedence over Birchos ha-Shachar since - as we learned - Birchos ha-Shachar can be made up after davening, while the skipped parts of Pesukei d'Zimrah cannot be made up according to the view of some poskim(31).

FOOTNOTES:

1 O.C. 336:8. Even a non-perforated pot is nourished a "bit" from the ground; Mishnah Berurah 336:43. Possibly, this is only so with wood or ceramic pots; metal or glass non-perforated pots do not allow for nourishment from the ground (Bris Olam, pg. 31). It remains questionable if plastic is like wood or like glass (see Piskei Teshuvos, pg. 223).

2 View of Chazon Ish, Harav S.Y. Elyashiv, and Harav S. Wosner (quoted in Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 73). There is a minority opinion that non-perforated pots are not "nourished" through solid (wooden or ceramic) floors (Bris Olam, pg. 31).

3 Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 336:38 quotes the Pri Megadim as questioning whether a plant can be moved [when no question of reaping is involved]. While some poskim (Tehilah l'David 336:6; Bris Olam, pg. 32) are lenient and allow moving a flowerpot when there is no question of reaping, many other poskim (Kalkeles Shabbos, Zore'a; Minchas Shabbos 80:194) are stringent. It is proper to be stringent on this issue (Harav S.Z. Auerbach and Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 73) and Harav M. Feinstein (quoted in Sefer Hilchos Shabbos, pg. 64).

4 Mishnah Berurah 336:48.

5 Entire paragraph is based on the rulings of the Chazon Ish, Shevi'is 22:1; Shvisas ha-Shabbos, Zore'a 10; Har Tzvi O.C. 211; Yesodei Yeshurun, pg. 25; Shevet ha-Levi 4:36.

6 Mishnah Berurah 336:48.

7 Harav M. Feinstein (quoted in Sefer Hilchos Shabbos, pg. 64).

8 Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 73); Bris Olam, pg. 32.

9 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah, pg. 333).

10 Mishnah Berurah 336:54.

11 O.C. 654:1; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah, pg. 333.

- 12 See Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 336:48; Yechaveh Da'as 2:53. Harav S.Z. Auerbach is quoted (Nishmas Avraham O.C. 336) as being stringent on this.
- 13 Igros Moshe O.C. 4:73.
- 14 O.C. 336:3; 312:6.
- 15 Mishnah Berurah 336:25 and Beiur Halachah.
- 16 Aruch ha-Shulchan 336:21. See also Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah, pg. 331.
- 17 Mishnah Berurah 336:24.
- 18 O.C. 52.
- 19 Mishnah Berurah 4:1. See Igros Moshe O.C. 3:4 who holds that it is considered tefillah b'tzibur as long as part of the Shemoneh Esrei is said together, even though one did not begin Shemoneh Esrei at the same time as the tzibur. Nevertheless, it is permitted to skip Pesukei d'Zimrah in order to begin Shemoneh Esrei together with the tzibur (oral ruling by Harav M. Feinstein, quoted in Orach Yisrael pg. 543).
- 20 Mishnah Berurah 7:5; 165:2.
- 21 Mishnah Berurah 52:9.
- 22 Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Tefillah K'hilchasah pg. 167).
- 23 Mishnah Berurah 52:9. See there and Beiur Halachah for what to do if he remembered only after Shemoneh Esrei.
- 24 Rama O.C. 46:9 and Mishnah Berurah 27-28.
- 25 Mishnah Berurah 51:10.
- 26 Beiur Halachah 52:1.
- 27 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (written responsum published in Siach Halachah pg. 10); Harav Y. Kamenetsky and Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (oral ruling quoted in Tefillah K'hilchasah pg. 192).
- 28 Berachos 60b.
- 29 O.C. 46:1-2.
- 30 Harav C. P. Scheinberg (oral ruling quoted in Tefillah K'hilchasah pg. 192). This seems to be the ruling of Chayei Adam 19:4. See also Avnei Yashfei on Tefillah, 2nd edition, pg. 121.
- 31 This is the ruling of the Aruch ha-Shulchan 52:5. Not all poskim are in agreement.

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