

# Kuntres K'Sheleg Yavinu

## The Laws of Snow on Shabbat

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Note: This Kuntres tries to straddle the line between concise and comprehensive. To that end, the "final answer" is underlined. Please consult me for any further questions at [heyrrabbi@brandeis.edu](mailto:heyrrabbi@brandeis.edu). Original sources appear in footnotes where it was convenient to do so.

### Is snow muktzeh?

- Well, for starters, rain is not. The reasoning that it is nolad -- something newly created on Shabbat -- is deflected by the conclusion of the gemara (Eruvin 46a, Mishna Berura 338:30<sup>1</sup>).
- This should logically apply to snow. Thus the clear majority of authorities are lenient (cf. R. Moshe Stern, Be'er Moshe 1:20; R. Yehoshua Neuwirth, Shemirat Shabbat Ke-Hilkheta, ch. 16:44 n. 110 and 15:36 in the name of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach and Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank; Har Tzvi, Soser; Harav Y.S. Elyashiv, Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 203, also the position of Rav Ovadia Yosef).
- R Moshe Feinstein alone stands up against snow (Igrot Moshe O.C. 5:22:37<sup>2</sup>, quoted in The Halachos of Muktza, p. 165 n. 10).
  - It is not clear why Rav Moshe does not equate snow and rain. Rav Aviner suggests that it could be because of meteorological differences in the creation of snow and rain, but rejects the approach anyway.

### Can I walk on snow (imprint of my shoe i.e. kotev / unavoidable nominal snow crushing)?

- Yes (SA OC 320:13)<sup>3</sup>
  - The Mishna Brura ad loc explains the reason: ein mitkaevn, and adds the Taz: since it is impossible to "be careful," Hazal never decreed a gzeira against it.
  - The upshot of that is that you don't have to *avoid* the snow when it is possible to.

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<sup>1</sup> לרחיצה - דאין על המטר היורד שם מוקצה או נולד ויכול לשתות או לרחוץ ממנו וה"ה אם הוא ראוי רק לשתית בהמה:  
<sup>2</sup> לז. טילטול שלג בשבת  
שאלה: אם שלג אסור בטילטול, ובהזדמנות אחרת פסק דהו"ל מוקצה.  
תשובה: הווי מוקצה דהווי נולד, וגשם (עירובין מ"ו ע"א גבי מיא בעיבא דאי אמרינן דמיבלע בליעי אסורים מטעם נולד, אלא מיא בעבים מינד נידי) אינו ראייה לסתור, דאינו כגשם (יתכן שכונתו ששלג שבעבים וודאי שכמאן דליתיה דמי, עי' שם מ"ה ע"ב ברש"י ד"ה מיבלע).  
<sup>3</sup> דורס שלג ברגליו ואינו חושש.

### *Can I crush snow?*

- No (SA OC 320:9)<sup>4</sup>
- You can chop it (and, more importantly, ice) up into smaller pieces if the piece you have is too large; “crushing” means to extract liquid from the chopping process. The red line here is blurry, so stick to ice cube trays and not icicles if you can.
- And to that end, avoiding washing your hands with ice water or snow (SA OC 320:11<sup>5</sup>).

### *Can I make snow balls?*

- Some permit (Be'er Moshe 6:30).
- The mainstream is that it is prohibited (Shemirat Shabbat K'hilchata 16:44). Concerns include schita (squeezing) and boneh (building). You may be lenient to make snowballs on Friday and save them for Shabbat.
  - Interestingly, soter (destroying) is not a concern of the poskim.<sup>6</sup>
  - It goes without saying that hurting people is prohibited by several violations of the Torah, but another one to be considered about in a Shabbos snowball fight is bruising your target.
- Even those who are lenient flatly forbid the making of a snowman on Shabbat.

### *May I salt my path / driveway?*

- Yes, if there is any question of potential injury (Piskei Teshuvot 338:13). (Otherwise, this type of salt is muktzeh.)
  - They used to salt the ramp in the Beit HaMikdash (Rambam Tmidim uMussafim 6:3<sup>7</sup>).
- Someone who does not shovel their snow / salt the ice on their property may be liable for any harm that befalls others on the part of their negligence (application of mitzvah of maakeh as well as the category of damages known as “bor.”)
- This is all assuming, of course, that you live within a kosher eruv. You may not carry outside the eruv in order to salt your pavement, but for this purpose you may ask a non-Jew.

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<sup>4</sup> השלג והברד, אין מרסקין אותם, דהיינו לשברם לחתיכות דקות כדי שיזובו מימיו, אבל יג נותן הוא לתוך כוס של יין או מים והוא נימוח מאליו ואינו חושש; וכן אם הניחם בחמה או כנגד המדורה ונפשרו, מותרים. <sup>5</sup> צריך ליזהר, בחורף, שלא יטול ידיו במים שיש בהם שלג או ברד; ואם יטול, יזהר שלא ידחקם בין ידיו, שלא יהא מרסק.

<sup>6</sup> מ"ב 320:36 : לשבר הקרח - דשבירת הקרח אינה מלאכה כלל ולא אסרו בריסוק אלא אם הוא עושה כדי שיזובו מימיו משא"כ בזה. כתב המ"א דבנהר או באר אסור דכיון דהוא מחובר לקרקע יש בו משום חשש בנין וסתירה אבל הרבה אחרונים חולקין עליו וס"ל דשם מים עליהן ואין שייך בו בנין וסתירה. ולצורך שבת יש להקל:

<sup>7</sup> ומולחין שם את האיברים וזורקין מלח על גבי הכבש אפילו בשבת, כדי שלא יחליק ויפלו הכהנים שם בעת הליכתן בעצים למערכה, ואף על פי שהמלח חוצץ בין רגליהם ובין הכבש הואיל ואין ההולכה הזאת עבודה אינן חוששין

### ***Can I shovel snow?***

- This is a more complicated question with many particulars.
  - For more information, see Orchot Shabbat vol. 2 pg. 94; Sefer 39 Melachos pg. 1098; Har Tzvi, Tal Oros, soter no. 1; shu"t Lev Avraham, no. 49; *Mishneh Halakhos* vol. 5 no. 4).
- I would recommend **consulting your Rav** with the specifics of your situation. I will say this:
  - Salting paths and breaking ice with a shovel in cases of risk of injury is more easily permitted.
  - If you have contractors who clear your snow for you whenever it snows based on a previously struck agreement, you do not need to stop them.

### ***Can I shake snow off my clothes?***

- Vigorous shaking of your clothes is prohibited because of mlaben. You should **gently shake off the snow** (specifically the top layer, not whatever has been absorbed into your clothing). (SA OC 302:1, MB s"k 4)

### ***Wait, so, bigger picture: is ice considered a liquid by halakha?***

- Yes: Rambam Tumat Met 15:2, Rambam Tumat Ochlin 1:22, Eglei Tal:Dosh, Pri Megadim OC Eshel Avraham 318
- No: Shulchan Aruch Harav; Seder Birkat Hanehenin 8:8

### ***Does this make any practical difference in my life?***

- Actually, yes! It affects our understanding of the status of ice cream and ices/popsicles. Is the minimum shiur for a brakha ahrona that of a solid food (k'zayit) or liquid (revi'it) and would you make a brakha on them if they were the dessert of a meal you washed on (we never make a brakha on liquid desserts).
- It (less practically) affects a question well known to those who have studied hilkhos mikvaot: can you use snow for a mikveh? If you can transfer the snow into the mikveh and allow it to melt there, then you are assuming ipso facto that snow is a solid. The permissibility of this action is a local mahloket rishonim (Rosh and Raavad) that may hinge on this broader question.

### ***Do I make a brakha on seeing snow?***

- **No**. It seems according to Tehillim 148 and Yoma 35b that snow wasn't a special occurrence in Israel.

### ***What's the most bizarre snow-related shaila you have seen?***

- Can a snow wall constitute a wall for the purposes of making an eruv (Aruch HaShulchan OC 362:15).