

Sowing (*Zore'a*)

What is the labor of Sowing?

The labor of Sowing opens the list of the thirty-nine primary categories of labor. It is the first of the labors involved in the preparation of bread.

Ostensibly, it is patently clear what constitutes the labor of sowing: placing a seed into the ground. Yet, analysis of the language of the *baraita* cited in the **Gemara** (73b) implies that the definition is broader:

With regard to one who sows, one who prunes, one who plants, one who bends, and one who grafts – they are all one labor.

Sowing (placing a seed in the ground), **planting** (placing a young plant or tree in the ground), **pruning** (trimming branches so the tree will grow better), **grafting** (attaching the branch of one tree to the trunk of another tree), and **bending** (the branch of a tree into the ground so a new tree will grow) are all prohibited due to Sowing.

At first glance, pruning is not similar to sowing, as nothing new is grown as a result of pruning. Therefore, one must conclude: **Any action that facilitates the growth of a plant is included in the prohibition of Sowing** (pp. 576–577).

During the act of sowing nothing is created immediately, and nevertheless, it is prohibited by Torah law. From this one can learn the monumental significance of all the small beginnings of people's actions in the world. Even actions that appear minor have the capacity to create and to build, and they should not be taken lightly, as it is specifically those actions that could ultimately be the most significant. **Moreover:** Even actions that do not have immediate results are greatly significant. They are considered creative and are prohibited on Shabbat. Nevertheless, after we perform our part, we must pray that God will bring our actions to fruition (pp. 577–578).

Sowing: Primary category and subcategories

PRIMARY CATEGORY: Included in the primary category are sowing, planting, bending, and grafting (see **Rambam**, ch. 7; **Yerushalmi** 7:2).

SUBCATEGORY: Watering, pruning (according to the **Rambam** it is a primary category), weeding (uprooting grass from the root), spraying insecticide, and the like. These actions are also prohibited by Torah law, because they facilitate growth of the plant and thereby produce a **result** similar to sowing. Yet, since they are not similar to the **act** of sowing, but only bring about a similar result, they merely subcategories.

Where was sowing performed in the Tabernacle?

For use in the Tabernacle, dye plants were sown, from which they prepared various dyes (e.g., sky-blue, purple) and dyed the curtains of the Tabernacle.¹

Practical ramifications of the labor of Sowing

Is it permitted to cast seeds or pits into the garden?

It is prohibited to cast seeds or pits into a garden or a courtyard even if one does not intend for them to grow, unless they are thrown to a place where it is unlikely that they will grow, e.g., when the

1. That is the opinion of **Rashi** and most of the *Rishonim* (see Introduction, pp. 34–38), that the primary categories were derived exclusively from the labors that were performed during the **construction of the Tabernacle**. According to **Rav Hai Gaon**, the labors were also derived from the actions performed **in the course of the routine activity in the Tabernacle**. On that basis, it can be explained that sowing and the rest of the labors involved in the sequence of preparing bread were performed for the purpose of baking the showbread, the griddle-cake meal-offering, and the like.

ground is hard and rain is not expected (*Yere'im* 274, followed by *Shulḥan Arukh* 336:4) (p. 579).

Is it permitted to germinate seeds in water?

The **Rambam** (8:2) rules that it is prohibited to soak seeds in water, and the *Shulḥan Arukh* rules likewise (336:11). The authorities disagree as to the reason for the prohibition:

1. The **Radbaz** (1611) understands that germinating the seeds in water **prepares them for sowing** in the ground.
2. The **Ḥayei Adam** (11:12) understands that the germination itself is considered sowing, even if one has no intention to later sow the seeds in the ground.

The *Mishna Berura* (336:51) rules in accordance with the opinion of the *Ḥayei Adam*. Therefore, **it is prohibited to germinate seeds even if one's intention is to eat them**. Despite this, it is permitted to soak seeds in the water for a brief period if one's intent is to soften them and not to germinate them (pp. 579–582).

Is it permitted to place flowers in a vase with water?

It is permitted to replace branches on which there are flowers that are not going to open (e.g., myrtle branches), into water **in which they had been placed previously** (*Sukka* 42a). In a time of need one may even place them into water in which they had not been placed previously (*Shaar HaTziyun* 336:48, based on *Peri Megadim* and *Shulḥan Arukh HaRav*). One may not add water to the vase or place water in an empty vase due to the exertion involved.

It is prohibited to place flowers that are going to open in water, and it is prohibited even to replace them in a vase in which they had been placed previously, due to the concern that this might constitute sowing (**Rema** 336:11, based on **Maharil**) (pp. 582–584).

Under what conditions may one pour water on the ground?

Watering plants is prohibited by Torah law. There is a dispute between the *amora'im* (*Moed Katan* 2b) if one who does so violates the prohibition of **Sowing**, because this causes the plants to grow, or if it violates the prohibition of **Plowing**, because it softens the earth.

As a matter of practical halakha we take into account both opinions. Therefore, it is prohibited to pour water on **earth that is meant to be plowed** even if there are no plants there, due to the concern of Plowing (*Shaar HaTziyun* 336:18). Nevertheless, it is permitted to pour water on ground that is not meant for plowing and does not have any plants, provided that the ground is firm (p. 586).

Is it permitted to wash one's hands over a plant if there is no intent to facilitate its growth?

The *Shulhan Arukh* (336:3) rules, following the *Yere'im* (274), that one may not wash his hands over a plant **even if there is no intent to facilitate its growth**, as inevitably, this will facilitate its growth.

By contrast, it is permitted to urinate on plants, since it does not contribute to the growth of the plant (*Shulhan Arukh* 336:3).

Moreover, **Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach** (cited in *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* 12:18) introduced a novel ruling that it is permitted to pour water on plants when there is no intent to facilitate their growth provided that one does so **in an indirect manner**. An example of this is if one uses a sink that has a pipe connected to it and the water reaches the plants via the pipe (p. 588).

Is it permitted to irrigate by means of a computer?

Fundamentally, it is permitted to program a computerized irrigation system so that irrigation will take place automatically on Shabbat (**Responsa Tzitz Eliezer** 4:31). Nevertheless, it is preferable to program the irrigation to take place on other days of the week, or at least to program it for the night hours, so that it will not compromise the honor of Shabbat (pp. 589–590).

Is it permitted to lift or to move a flowerpot?

Lifting flowerpots on Shabbat involves a potential violation of the prohibition of Reaping when raising the flowerpot and potential violation of the prohibition of Sowing when putting it down (see **mishna** 95b; *Shulhan Arukh* 336:8). In addition, according to some authorities these also entail a prohibition of *muktze*.

In practice, if the flowerpot is on a surface that is not made of earthenware or wood and its branches do not protrude beyond the sides of the flowerpot, it is assumed that the plant does not receive nourishment from the ground, and it is permitted to lift it. If the branches protrude beyond the sides of the flowerpot and the flowerpot is placed on floor tiles but is not on the ground floor, one may be lenient and lift it. If it is on floor tiles but it is on the ground floor, fundamentally, one may be lenient and lift it, but it is preferable to be stringent and move it without lifting it.

If the flowerpot is in a garden or the like and there is no surface beneath it, or even if there is a surface beneath it but its branches protrude beyond the sides of the flowerpot, it is prohibited to lift it.

In any case, it is permitted to move the flowerpot without lifting it. Nevertheless, if moving the flowerpot is intended to protect it, it is preferable to be stringent and move it with a foot, or in some other unusual manner.

It is worth noting that a **flowerpot with flowers is not *muktze***, and it is permitted to lift it on Shabbat (*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-Hilkhata* 26:25) (pp. 592–597).

Is it permitted to open a window or shutters near a plant?

It is prohibited to open a window or shutters in order to enhance growth of a plant. It is permitted to open them if the intent is to ventilate the house and the like, even if opening the window or shutters will facilitate growth of the plant, because when there is no intent to facilitate the growth, it is not considered sowing at all (*Responsa Yehaveh Daat* 5:29) (pp. 599–602).

Rav Avraham Danzig

[*Hayei Adam*]

Rav Avraham Danzig was born in Danzig, Poland, in 1748. He studied in Prague, first in the local yeshiva, and later under **Rav Yehezkel Landau**, author of the *Noda BiYehuda* and the city's rabbi. After he married he moved to Vilna, where he worked for many years as a merchant while at the same time serving unofficially as rabbi. Only when he was over sixty years of age and had become impoverished was he appointed as rabbi and local rabbinic judge in an official capacity, which was the source of his livelihood from that point onward.

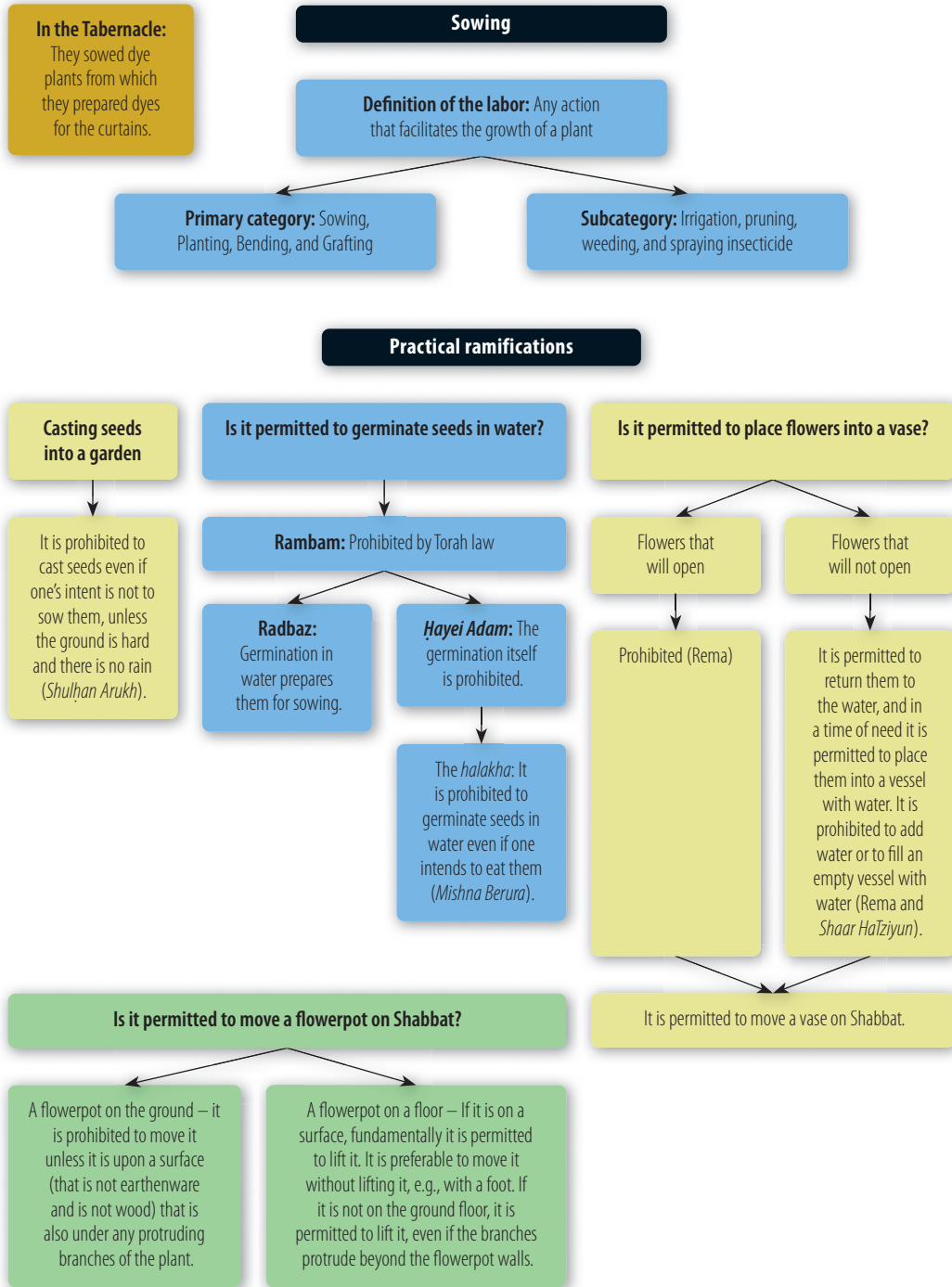
Rav Danzig composed various halakhic works, the most well-known of which are *Hayei Adam* on *Orah Hayim*, and *Hokhmat Adam* on *Yoreh De'a*. His books follow an order which differs from that of the *Tur* and the *Shulhan Arukh*. They consist of summaries of *halakhot*, with the addition of his own rulings. *Hayei Adam* was an important source of Ashkenazi halakhic rulings up to the time of the *Mishna Berura*, which often cites *Hayei Adam*.

In his introduction to *Hokhmat Adam*, Rav Danzig relates how he was able to grow as a Torah scholar and to write two significant works of *halakha* despite the fact that for many years he was a merchant who spent most of his time traveling, often great distances. He maintains that when a person is constantly thinking about his Torah studies, and this is the most important thing in his eyes, yet he is forced to work for his living, his business dealings do not impair his connection to the Torah or his ability to progress in his studies and produce novel ideas. He states the following about himself:

When I travel on a journey, I meditate on it [the Torah]; and when I sit in the store, I meditate on it; and may I receive my reward, because even when I was engaged in business, on many occasions my mind was focused on it, ruminating on some interpretation or difficulty.

Rav Danzig died in 1831.

HALAKHIC OVERVIEW



Practical ramifications (continued)

