

Plowing (*Horesh*)

What is the labor of Plowing?

The Gemara (73b) states:

With regard to one who plows, one who digs, one who plants, and one who makes a furrow – they are all one labor.

What do plowing, digging, and making a furrow in the ground have in common? Rashi explains that “they are all performed to loosen the earth.” In his opinion, any action intended to loosen and soften the earth is included in the category of plowing; therefore, one who digs or one who makes a furrow, each of which actions loosens the earth, is liable due to Plowing.

Another approach to the definition of the labor of Plowing emerges from the explanation of Rabbeinu Hananel (74a) based on the Yerushalmi (7:2), and similarly in the Rambam (8:1). According to this opinion, Plowing does not relate specifically to the loosening and softening of the earth. Rather, it relates to any action that facilitates the enhancement and improvement of the earth in preparation for sowing (pp. 607–611).

Primary category and subcategory

PRIMARY CATEGORY: Plowing, digging a furrow (Gemara 73b; Rambam 7:2). Subcategory: Leveling earth (Gemara ibid., Rambam 8:1), weeding to prepare for planting (Mishna 103a, Rambam ibid.), fertilizing earth (Yerushalmi 7:2)

Where was plowing performed for the Tabernacle?

For the Tabernacle, the land was plowed in order to sow the plants used to dye the curtains.

Practical ramifications of the labor of Plowing

Is the prohibition of Plowing in effect on land not designated for sowing?

The prohibition of Plowing does not apply to **land that is not at all fit for sowing**. Nevertheless, concerning land that is fundamentally fit for sowing, even if it is **not designated for sowing** and there is no intent to sow in it (e.g., dirt lots in public areas), there is a prohibition by Torah law of plowing (*Eglei Tal*, *Ḥoresh 16*).¹ When land is designated for building a residence, plowing is permitted by Torah law, since doing so makes it less useful as a residence, and is therefore a destructive act. Smoothing the surface of the land is prohibited due to Building, as flat land is better for building a residence (pp. 610–611).

Is it permitted to make a furrow in the ground?

As seen in the *Gemara*, one of the actions included in the labor of Plowing is making a furrow. Therefore, it is prohibited by Torah law to make a furrow in the ground. Making the furrow facilitates sowing; therefore, it is prohibited due to Plowing (p. 612).

What is the *halakha* when one does not intend to make a furrow, e.g., dragging an item on the ground?

In this regard, there is a distinction between two situations: (1) If it is not inevitable that a furrow will be formed it is permitted to drag the item, since the *halakha* is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Shimon that an unintentional act is permitted (*Gemara* 75a; *Shulḥan Arukh* 337:1). (2) If formation of the furrow is inevitable, e.g., if the item is heavy, it is prohibited to drag the item (*Gemara* 75a; *Shulḥan Arukh* 337:1; *Magen Avraham* 337:1. This prohibition is by rabbinic law only, since the furrow was made in an unusual manner (*shinui*), and at times it is even considered a destructive act.

1. By contrast, from the *Magen Avraham* (526:10) it appears that there is no Torah prohibition in doing so.

Therefore, **it is also prohibited to sit on a chair that is situated on the ground** if it will inevitably cause creation of a furrow (although some Sephardi authorities rule that it is permitted). Even so, it is permitted to remove an item that is stuck in the ground of a field or in a flowerpot, since the hole was formed before the item was removed. It is nevertheless prohibited to do so in the dirt floor of a house, as one might ultimately smooth the holes in the floor (*Gemara* 113; *Mishna Berura* 311:28) (p. 615).

Is it permitted to drag heavy items on a tiled floor?

From the *Gemara* (29b) it emerges that dragging items is prohibited even on a floor of that kind, because there is a decree that one might ultimately drag them on a dirt floor. The *Rishonim* disagreed whether that decree is in effect even in a place where **all the houses in the city have tiled floors**. *Tosafot* (29b, s.v. *gezeira*) ruled leniently, and the *Ramban* (95a, s.v. *hakha*) ruled stringently. In terms of the *halakha*, the *Mishna Berura* (*Shaar HaTziyun* 337:2) ruled that one may be lenient in accordance with the opinion of *Tosafot*, since, in any case, making the furrow is digging performed not in the standard manner, and it is considered a destructive act (p. 615).

May one push a stroller on a dirt floor or path?

Ostensibly, it should be prohibited, as a furrow is formed. Yet, the *mishna* (*Beitza* 23b) establishes that it is permitted because the wheels of the stroller **level** the dirt. They do not create a furrow by moving the dirt aside, like the leg of a chair or a table; rather, they do so by compacting and compressing the dirt beneath them. Making a furrow in that manner is permitted, and is not considered Plowing. This is the halakhic ruling: Even if it is clear that a furrow of sorts will be created by pushing the stroller, it is permitted to push it on the dirt (*Kaf HaHayim* 337:4; *Hut Shani*, vol. 1, p. 95, citing the *Hazon Ish*) (pp. 616–618).

Is it permitted for children to play in a sandbox?

Children may play in a sandbox; since it is designated for play, it is not *muktze* (*Shulḥan Arukh* 308:38). By contrast, they may not play in the sand at the beach or with sand that was set aside to be used in construction, because such sand is *muktze* on Shabbat (*Mishna Berura* 308:144).

One must caution children not to build with the sand, nor to dig holes in it, due to the primary categories of Building and Plowing. But if the sand is very soft, to the extent that if one digs a hole, the sand will refill it, it is permitted to build with it (*Mishna Berura* 308:143, based on *Tosafot* 38a, s.v. *ika*). In any case, one must caution children not to add water to the sandbox, as this constitutes Kneading (see p. 1032). Furthermore, the damp sand is apt to be firm and not to collapse; therefore, playing in it is prohibited due to Building or Plowing (pp. 618–619).

Is it permitted to sweep the floor?

The *Rishonim* disagree (based on *Gemara* 95a) as to whether it is permitted to sweep the floor in the house. *Baal Halakhot Gedolot* and the *Rif* permitted doing so, while *Rashi* and the *Rambam* prohibited doing so due to the concern that one will ultimately fill holes in the floor of the house. Among those who prohibit it, there is a dispute whether the prohibition is in effect only with regard to a dirt floor (*Rambam* 21:3), or whether it is prohibited even with regard to a tiled floor, due to the concern that one will ultimately sweep a floor that is not tiled (*Tosafot* 95a, s.v. *shara*), or due to the prohibition of *muktze* entailed in moving the dirt (*Rosh* 10:3).

In terms of the *halakha*, the *Shulḥan Arukh* (337:2) permits sweeping a tiled floor, and adds that some permit doing so even if it is not tiled. The *Rema* rules that it is prohibited to sweep even a tiled floor.

The *Beur Halakha* (s.v. *veyesh mahmirin*) writes that today, when most of the floors of houses in the city are tiled, it is permitted to sweep the floor even according to the *Rema*, and sweeping with a

broom resolves the problem of *muktze*. Therefore, the *halakha* is that **it is permitted for both Ashkenazim and Sephardim to sweep a tiled floor on Shabbat**, and it is permitted to gather the refuse and throw it out using a dustpan (pp. 619–631).

Is it permitted to wash a floor that became dirty?

The **Gemara** (151b) explains that it is prohibited to wash a floor on Shabbat, due to the concern that one will ultimately fill the holes. From the Gemara, it emerges that this applies even when the floor is tiled, and that is the halakhic conclusion (*Shulḥan Arukh* 337:3). The *Maggid Mishne* (21:3) explains that washing the floor **on Shabbat is not as essential as sweeping**; therefore, the Sages did not permit it on Shabbat. The *halakha* is that one may not wash the floor even in a place where all the houses in the locale have tiled floors (*Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* 23:6). In a situation where washing the floor is **extremely essential** one may be lenient; therefore, it is permitted to wash the floor in a hospital (*Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* 23:6) or where there is concern that someone will slip, fall, and be injured due to a spill or the like (*Shulḥan Arukh* 334:27) (pp. 632–635).

In what circumstances it is permitted to use a squeegee to remove water?

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* 23:7, note 27) introduced a novel ruling that one may be lenient in two cases: (1) If water spilled, it is permitted to remove it with a squeegee. (2) It is permitted to pour water on a dirty area on the floor and to remove it with a squeegee, since cleaning a specific area, as opposed to an entire room, is permitted (similar rulings were cited in *Or LeTziyon* 2:43, note 8; and *Yalkut Yosef*, vol. 8, p. 65).

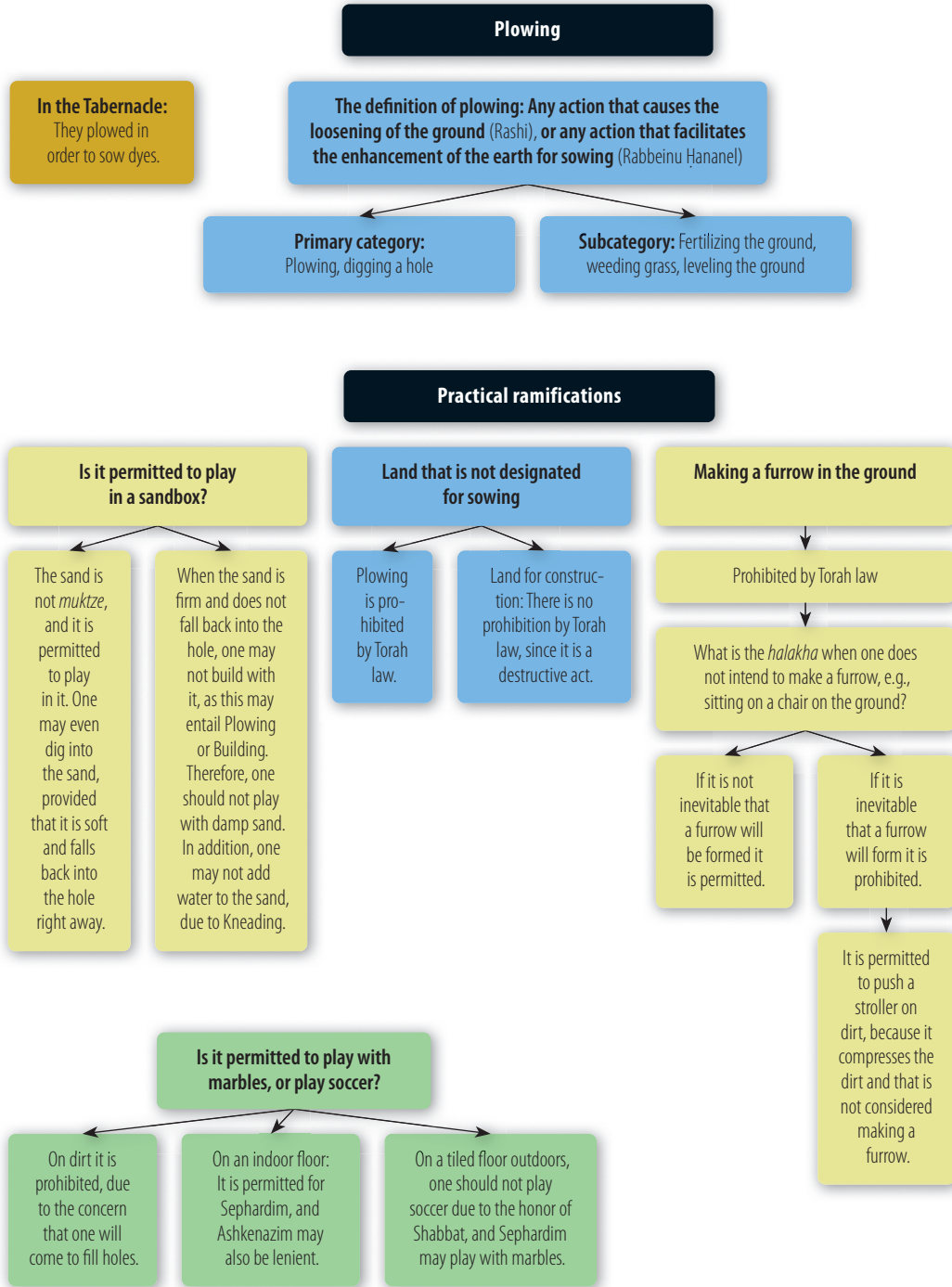
The leniency is only to remove the water with a squeegee. One may not scrub the floor with a wet rag, as that would constitute Squeezing. It is permitted to use a rag to absorb the water, since it is a fabric about whose condition one does not care. Therefore, the Sages did not issue a decree due to the concern that one will

ultimately squeeze the water out. Absorbing the water with the rag is considered “absorbing in the manner of making dirty” (**Rema** 301:46; **Mishna Berura** 301:172, 302:47). One who chooses not to absorb the water with a rag may push the water onto a tiled area adjacent to the house, even though it is likely that it will flow from there onto dirt (similar to the ruling cited in the *halakhot* of Sowing (p. 588) citing Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach) (p. 635).

Is it permitted to play with marbles, or play soccer?

The **Gemara** in *Eiruvin* (104a) states that it is prohibited to play with nuts on the ground on Shabbat due to the concern that one will ultimately fill holes in the ground, and that is the ruling in the **Shulḥan Arukh** (338:5). Similar to sweeping the house, here too there is a dispute whether the prohibition applies only to a dirt floor (**Shulḥan Arukh**) or even to a tiled floor (**Rema**). Today, when the floors of most houses are tiled, even according to the Rema, one may be lenient and play games typically played on a tiled floor on the floor in the house, and there is room to be lenient for other games as well. One may not play these games outside the house even on a tiled floor (based on *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* 16:5; *Ketzot HaShulḥan* 146, *Badei HaShulḥan*, end of subparagraph 60). Accordingly, it is permitted for Sephardim to play such games on any tiled area, while for Ashkenazim, it is permitted to play these games only on the floor in the house, specifically in a place where one typically plays these games inside the house. Sephardim are permitted to play soccer inside the house, and there is room to be lenient for Ashkenazim as well, but all should refrain from playing Soccer in outdoor facilities since this compromises the honor of Shabbat. (pp. 636–641).

HALAKHIC OVERVIEW



Practical ramifications
(continued)

