

# DAY-TO-DAY HALACHIC GUIDE

- Special edition -

Detailed instructions on the  
laws and customs for

**Nittel / 10 Teves 5781**

FROM THE BADATZ  
OF CROWN HEIGHTS



## WEDNESDAY, 8 TEVES

On the eighth of Teves, the Torah was first translated into Greek by order of King Ptolmey. This caused “three days of darkness to descend upon the world.”<sup>68</sup> That day was “as difficult for the Jews as the day on which the Golden Calf was made.”<sup>69</sup> The Rebbe explains this concept in *Likkutei Sichos* and *Sefer Hasichos* 5752.<sup>70</sup>

On this day in 5573 (1812), the Alter Rebbe reached the village of Pienna, after fleeing Liadi to escape Napoleon’s advance into Russia. (The Alter Rebbe passed away in Pienna soon after on *Chof-Daled Teves*.)

Today is the *yahrtzeit* of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, the wife of the Tzemach Tzedek. She passed away in the year 5621 (1860) and is buried in the town of Lubavitch.

## THURSDAY, 9 TEVES

Chazal state that the ninth of Teves is one of the dates on which calamities befell our ancestors and it is appropriate to spend the day fasting. They also note, however, that there is no record of what these calamities were.<sup>71</sup> It has since been explained that Ezra *HaSofer* died on this date. The commentators to *Megillas Taanis* describe additional events. The Rebbe’s explanation appears in *Sefer Hasichos* 5749.<sup>72</sup>

Tonight is nittel. Make sure to finish Chitas and Rambam before sunset.

### Nittel:

The Rebbe notes that *Nittel Nacht* (Night of Nittel) occurs often during or in proximity to the days of Chanukah.<sup>73</sup>

The name *nittel* alludes to an absence, a euphemism for birth. Some suggest it is related to the word *nitleh* and *taloy*, “the hanged one”, a reference to “that man” (*oso ha’ish*), the individual who is the focus of worship in the *notzri* religion. The date officially marks the birth of that man. Accordingly, the term *nittel* can be related to the Latin *natal*, “birth.”

It is an ancient Jewish practice (which thereby becomes a venerated part of Torah) and it is also the Chabad custom,

68) *Megillas Ta’anis*, quoted in *Shulchan Aruch*

69) *Maseches Sofrim*

70) *Likkutei Sichos*, beginning of vol. 24; *Sefer Hasichos* 5752, *Parshas Mikeitz*

71) *Megillas Ta’anis*, quoted in *Shulchan Aruch*

72) *Vayigash*, 9 Teves

73) *Sefer Hasichos Shabbos Parshas Vayeishev* 5750

to refrain from studying Torah on *Nittel Nacht*, from sunset until halachic midnight. The reason is “to avoid adding vitality to the forces of impurity.” Other reasons, offered by great Torah sages, are recorded in the books that explain the reasons for *minhagim*. The Rebbe mentions these in *Igros Kodesh* and *Likkutei Sichos*.<sup>74</sup> In other sources, it is explained that the phrase “to avoid adding vitality to *kelipos*” is directed at “that man” who was deified by the non-Jews as well as those who presently follow his path. See the above *Igros Kodesh* to understand how it is possible for Torah study to produce negative results.

The timing of *Nittel Nacht* does not follow the Jewish calendar, but rather, the secular calendar. The date must be determined by the observance of the local non-Jewish population. The Jews of each country observe this custom on the eve of *yom eidam* (lit. the day of their calamity, used as a metonymy for festival) as it is celebrated by the non-Jews of their country. In the United States, this sets the date as December 25th. In a location with variances in the dates for the non-Jewish *yom eidam*, *Nittel Nacht* is observed on the date that the majority of the local non-Jews celebrate.<sup>75</sup>

The willful avoidance of Torah study is a surprising and unprecedented concept. It must not be extended beyond the strict duration set by Jewish custom just one night, until midnight.

Regarding the conduct of the Rebbe Rashab on *Nittel Nacht* and the implied directive, see *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Vayeishev* 5750: “From this we derive a directive as well as an infusion of ability to utilize the duration of *nittel*, not to waste our time, G-d forbid (simply in order to avoid adding vitality to *kelipos*), but rather for a practical benefit. It is especially appropriate to use this time for matters that lead to increased wisdom ... or to increase in acts of *tzedakah* and *chessed*, or to take care of the home, and the like.”<sup>76</sup>

In his notes from the winter of 5695, recorded in Vienna, the Rebbe relates that the Rebbe Rashab would also refrain from studying *Chassidus* on *Nittel Nacht*, even in a cursory manner. When *nittel* coincided with the eve of Shabbos, he would defer the delivering of his customary *ma’amar* to Shabbos morning instead.<sup>77</sup>

74) *Igros Kodesh* vol. 14, p. 351; *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 15, p. 554

75) See footnotes to *Sefer Hasichos* 5750, vol. 1, p. 192

76) Printed in *Sefer HaSichos*. See further in the original *sichah*.

77) For more on this topic, see *Heichal Menachem*, p. 268. However, refer to

## THURSDAY NIGHT, EVE OF 10 TEVES

### A DAY OF REJOICING-TO-BE

The Rebbe often mentions that the preparations for Yud Shevat begin thirty days in advance, from the tenth of Teves. This is especially relevant this year, for on the upcoming Yud Shevat, we will have completed seventy years from the Rebbe's acceptance of leadership (in the year 5711).

On the eve of the tenth of Teves 5752, the Rebbe explains that although the tenth of Teves begins at night (as is the case with all Jewish dates), the actual fast only begins at dawn. The lack of fasting on the eve of the tenth of Teves symbolizes the power that is granted at that time to reverse the negative events that the fast day commemorates. It is an auspicious time for *teshuvah* that will bring the Redemption and a night of opportunity to forever nullify the fast before it begins. The Rebbe pointed out that the night stretches for a number of hours, which offers ample time for *teshuvah*.

As is the case with any fast that begins in the morning, we are permitted to eat throughout the night until dawn, provided that we had not gone to sleep in between. Dozing off temporarily is not considered going to sleep in this regard. You may also eat or drink if you stipulate before going to sleep that you intend to awaken before dawn. Someone who regularly rises from their sleep to drink at night, may do so tonight even without a stipulation

Nevertheless, from within a (halachic) half hour of dawn (*alos ha-shachar*) it is forbidden to eat a meal or wash for bread. It is permitted only to snack on fruits or vegetables, drink as much non-alcoholic beverages as you wish, or eat a quantity of *mezonos* the size of *kebeitzah* but not more.

## FRIDAY, EREV SHABBOS VAYIGASH

### ASARAH B'TEVES—A DAY OF REJOICING-TO-BE

“In one aspect at least, the fast of *Asarah b'Teves* even nowadays is more severe than other fasts: If it coincides with *erev Shabbos*, the fast must be completed all the way until nightfall (*tzeis ha-kochavim*). This is true even for those who prayed Maariv for Shabbos early, while it was still daytime. This ruling is upheld even according to those authorities that

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the *reshimah* of Chof Kislev 5693. Also take note of a short *Sichah* delivered on *Leil Gimmel D'Chanukah* 5750.

Regarding the *mitzvah* of a *mikveh* night that coincides with *nittel*, see *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 12, p. 424.

prohibit fasting on the other fast days that coincide with *erev Shabbos*, once Maariv has been recited.”<sup>78</sup>

“The *halachah* states that ‘regarding all of these four fasts, if they coincide with Shabbos they must be postponed.’ Nevertheless, *Asarah b’Teves* carries a stringency not found in the other three fasts, and that is because [nowadays,] it is the only one that is able to coincide with *erev Shabbos* (as it does this year). When it does, we must continue fasting until nightfall even if we recited Maariv for Shabbos while it was still daytime.”<sup>79</sup>

The fast commemorates the date on which the king of Babylon laid siege to Yerushalayim. All men (from the age of thirteen years) and women (from the age of twelve years) should refrain from eating and drinking from daybreak until nightfall. Those who wish to wake up early and eat before daybreak should have in mind to do so before retiring the night before. Pregnant or nursing women who have difficulty fasting, or people feeling ill, are exempt. Consult a *Rav* if necessary.

Dawn and the start of the fast are at **5:49 am**.

**Law of Redemption:** All of the fast days (except Yom Kippur) will be canceled in the era of Moshiach. In fact, they will become “*yomim tovim* and days of feasting and gladness.” This is further discussed in *Likkutei Sichos*; the Rebbe draws particular relevance to the Fast of Teves.<sup>80</sup>

The Rebbe explains that the events marked by the Fast of Teves were the start and eventual cause of the calamities commemorated by the remaining fasts. Therefore, when the Fast of Teves is transformed into a *yom tov*, all other fast days are consequently transformed along with it into “*yomim tovim* and days of feasting and gladness.”<sup>81</sup>

It is customary to increase in *tzedakah* on fast days. According to custom, a person should estimate the average cost of his daily meals and donate that amount to *tzedakah* on the eve of the fast.

Someone who accidentally eats today is nevertheless obligated to complete the fast. In such a case, there is no obligation of compensation, meaning that there is no

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78) *Sichas Asarah b’Teves* 5749, in *Sefer Hasichos* p. 136.

79) *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 25, p. 267, fn. 5

80) *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 15, p. 412. For the concept of holding a festive meal in the era of Redemption, see *Magen Avraham, Tisha b’Av*, 552:11 and *Sichas Beis d’Rosh Hashanah* 5752.

81) *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 25, p. 449

requirement to fast on a subsequent day. Nevertheless, they may choose to do so as an atonement for breaking a fast.

If only a small amount of food was eaten accidentally (less than the size of *koseves* [a large date], eaten within the time frame of *bich'dei achilas pras*), or a small quantity of liquid was drunk (less than a *revi'is*), it is still considered fasting and the *Aneinu* prayer in the *amidah* may be recited. If, however, these limits were exceeded, the *Aneinu* text should be amended to read: *Aneinu be-yom tzom ha-ta'anis zeh* (“Answer us on this fast day”), rather than *ta'aniseinu* (“our fasting”).

The Torah is read during Shacharis and Minchah, and the *Haftorah* is read during Minchah, as on every fast day.

In Shacharis and Minchah, the *chazzan* adds *Aneinu* in the *amidah*, between the blessings of *go'eil Yisrael* and *Refa'einu*. If he omitted *Aneinu*, see footnote.<sup>82</sup>

During Shacharis, *Selichos* are recited.

This is the order for Shacharis: *Tachanun*, *Selichos*. *Avinu Malkeinu*, *Va'anachnu Lo Nay'da* followed by *Chatzi Kaddish*. Reading of the Torah. The *aliyos* are read from the section of *Va-yechal Moshe*.

When a *chosson* is present for the prayers, or if a *bris* will be held, or the like, the custom practiced in 770<sup>83</sup> is for the congregation to proceed with *Selichos* but to omit *viduy*, *tachanun*, and *Avinu malkeinu* from the prayers.<sup>84</sup>

This same reading is repeated for Minchah, with the addition of the *Haftorah* of *Dirshu Hashem*.

On a regular weekday—and especially on *erev Shabbos*—it is appropriate to ensure that Minchah is completed before sunset (*sheki'ah*). This is all the more important on a fast day,

82) If the *chazzan* omitted *Aneinu* and has not yet pronounced Hashem's name at the conclusion of *Refa'einu*, he should return to recite *Aneinu*. If he already pronounced Hashem's name, he should recite *Aneinu* in the blessing of *Shema Koleinu* as each individual does when praying Minchah silently. In that case, he should conclude the blessing with the words: *ha-oneh ba-eis tzarah ve-shomei'a tefillah*. If he already passed *Shema Koleinu*, he should recite *Aneinu* as a passage for itself after the blessing of *Sim Shalom*.

83) Over the years, the Rebbe issued varying directives to various individuals regarding this matter, which makes the topic too lengthy to analyze here. The current practice is as we have described.

84) There is no interference with the order of the *Selichos* itself; the congregation begins with *Selach Lanu*, and also recites the *viduy* part of *Selichos* (*Ashamnu*) as usual. It is only the *tachanun*, etc., that are recited as part of Shacharis that are skipped on such an occasion—and this concession is sufficient recognition of the *chosson's* presence, or of the *bris* that will take place.

for a number of reasons and concerns. However, if this was not done—it is already twilight (*bein ha-shamashos*) and there are those who still have not prayed Minchah—it is permissible to proceed with reading the Torah and the *Haftorah*, and praying Minchah, despite the late hour.<sup>85</sup>

During Minchah, each individual recites *Aneinu* in *Shema Koleinu*. If someone forgot to recite it, see footnote.<sup>86</sup>

The *chazzan*, when repeating the *amidah* out loud, recites the *Aneinu* prayer before beginning the paragraph of *refa'einu*.

The *chazzan* recites *Birchas kohanim* in his repetition of the *Amidah* (as he usually does during *Shacharis*).

This is the order for Minchah: *Hodu, Pasach Eliyahu* (this year), *Korbanos. Ashrei* followed by *Chatzi Kaddish*.

The reading of the Torah (*Va-yechal*) and the *Haftorah*.

*Yehalelu* followed by *Chatzi Kaddish. Amidah* with the addition of *Aneinu. Kaddish Tiskabel. Aleinu* followed by *Kaddish Yasom* and then *Al Tira* and *Ach Tzaddikim*. If an *avel* is present, he recites *Mishnayos* followed by *Kaddish d'Rabbanan*. This year, neither *tachanun* nor the longer version of *Avinu Malkeinu* are recited.

After Minchah, it is customary to listen to *divrei kivushin*—a speech urging self-improvement and further advancement in the service of Hashem. This is done despite today being *erev Shabbos*.<sup>87</sup>

“We have repeatedly discussed the *minhag Yisrael* of delivering *divrei kevushin* [an address that motivates its audience to self-improve] following the Minchah service on fast days ... to inspire people to *teshuvah*. However, when the fast of *Asarah b'Teves* coincides with *erev Shabbos*, there is room to debate whether this custom should be implemented:

“Firstly, on the afternoon of *erev Shabbos*, people are extremely preoccupied with their *Shabbos* preparations. According

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85) The *Acharonim* cast doubt on the appropriateness of reciting *Aneinu* once *Shabbos* has begun (e.g., see *Sha'alos u'Teshuvos Devar Yehoshu'a, Yoreh De'ah*, 63). However, there is no issue with a *chazzan's* recital of *Birchas Kohanim* after *shekiyah*. (See *Shulchan Aruch Admor Hazaken*, 623:8 even regarding *duchaning*, which must be recited before *tzeis ha-kochavim*, which implies that before *tzeis ha-kochavim*, it is still permissible. If so, this is certainly true of the *chazzan's* recital of *Birchas Kohanim*. (This however requires further analysis: why does the *Alter Rebbe* conclude with a mention of “daytime,” and also, did he reverse this decision in his *Siddur* that was published later, in which many earlier decisions were reversed?)

86) If one forgot to recite *Aneinu* in the *amidah* of Mincha, but remembered it before stepping back at the end of the *amidah*, they should recite it after *Elokai Netzor*. If they had already stepped back, they should not recite it at all.

87) See *Sichas Asarah B'Teves* 5744.

to Torah, we should *run* to ensure that all of the Shabbos preparations are completed in time ... Seemingly, there is simply no time to stop and listen to *divrei kevushin*. Secondly, we are not permitted to experience sadness on Shabbos. It is obvious that we cannot *enter* Shabbos in a morose frame of mind either. And even before the entry of Shabbos, we are to engage in our Shabbos preparations joyfully.

“Now, as far as the actual fast is concerned, we have an *obligation* to fast—as recorded in the *Shulchan Aruch*. This must be observed all the way until the end of the day, despite the fact that *Asarah b’Teves* coincides with *erev* Shabbos. By contrast, the delivery of *divrei kevushin* is merely a *minhag* (custom). There is room to question whether this practice remains relevant when the fast coincides with *erev* Shabbos.

“It is also worth noting that it is extremely rare for one the four fasts to coincide with *erev* Shabbos ... which could lead us to conclude that the force of the *minhag* is removed by the rarity of the circumstance ... in accordance with the principle that the force of a *minhag* does not apply to an uncommon case.

“That said, there is a simple solution to maintaining the *minhag* even when *Asarah b’Teves* coincides with *erev* Shabbos, as we will explain: The main theme of a fast day is that it is *yom ratzon la-Hashem*, a day of special Divine favor ... Naturally, an occasion of Divine favor is a happy experience. Furthermore, the point of fasting is to engage in “one of the methods of *teshuvah*” ... and the *perfection* of *teshuvah* is *teshuvah ila’ah*, “higher *teshuvah*,” which is conducted specifically with great joy. Accordingly, an address that focuses on the theme of the fast day, *divrei kevushin*, can be devoted to joyful matters, to the idea that it is a time of special divine favor, to *teshuvah ila’ah* that must be performed with tremendous happiness, and similar concepts. In this way, the address will not contradict our obligation to avoid sadness on Shabbos.

“Furthermore, even the concept of affliction associated with abstaining from food and drink, along with the part of *divrei kevushin* that calls for *mussar*, rebuke for inappropriate matters—both of which are not happy experiences—are reframed as *preparations* for the complete joy of Shabbos. This can be understood in light of the teaching in *Igeres Hakodesh*,<sup>88</sup> that as a preparation and preface to *teshuvah ila’ah*, we must first experience *teshuvah tata’ah*, the lower [ordinary] form of *teshuvah*. The regular *teshuvah* completes and amplifies the joy of *teshuvah ila’ah* ... Consequently, even literal *divrei kevushin*, meaning words of *mussar* and the like, remain relevant today—as a preparation for Shabbos, for they allow us to arrive at the superior experience of *teshuvah ila’ah* on Shabbos itself.”<sup>89</sup>

88) ch. 10

89) *Sichas Asarah b’Teves* 5744

Those who are scrupulous to avoid showering or bathing on a fast day should not follow this stringency today; they should wash themselves in honor of Shabbos. Nor should one be stringent to avoid cutting hair or nails, or laundering clothes.

If it is necessary to taste the food that is being readied for Shabbos for the sake of accurate preparation, one may rely on those authorities that permit tasting a small quantity and then spitting it out.

Today we recite *shnayim mikra ve'echad targum* for *Parshas Vayigash*.

Check your pockets on *erev* Shabbos before the onset of Shabbos. This is especially important for those who wore the same Shabbos / Yom Tov clothing earlier this week in honor of *Hei Teves*.

Those who accept Shabbos early, before its official starting time, must be careful to avoid lighting Shabbos candles before *plag ha-minchah* (in Brooklyn, 3:37 pm). Regardless of when they accept Shabbos, they must continue fasting until nightfall (*tzeis ha-kochavim*; in Brooklyn, 5:05 pm). At that point, they must recite *Shema* (since the obligation of the nighttime *Shema* has begun), and only then recite *kiddush* and eat.

Candle lighting is at **4:16 pm**.

The fast ends at **5:05 pm**.

## **SHABBOS PARSHAS VAYIGASH, 11 TEVES**

The fast must be continued until nightfall (*tzeis ha-kochavim*).

We make a point of reciting *Kabbalas Shabbos* and *Maariv* as soon as the appropriate time arrives, without delaying it further. There should be sufficient time to conclude and recite *kiddush* before the seventh hour (which in Brooklyn is 5:56–6:56 pm).

It is important to avoid tasting anything before *kiddush*.

Those for whom, for whatever reason, it is impossible to wait until after *Maariv* to break their fast may recite *kiddush* immediately after nightfall (*tzeis ha-kochavim*), before praying *Maariv*. In such a case, they may not eat more than the amount of a *kebeitzah* of *mezonos* before praying *Maariv*. Alternatively, they may arrange for someone to remind them later of their obligation to recite *krias shema* and pray *Maariv*.

Those who do not wish to drink wine tonight should either

compel themselves to drink it nonetheless for the sake of *kiddush*, or listen to someone else reciting *kiddush* and fulfill their obligation that way. But they should not recite the nighttime *kiddush* over bread (*challah*), nor should they use an alternative beverage to wine.

If the above options are not possible—for example, if a woman cannot wait for her husband’s return from *shul* to break her fast but cannot drink the wine herself—and if grape juice is also not a possible alternative, they should recite *kiddush* over bread and not employ an alternative beverage to wine or grape juice.

Someone who desires to drink water immediately following *kiddush*, before washing for *challah*, must be careful to drink less than a *revi*’is of water.

Daytime Torah reading: The Rebbe states that “according to Jewish custom (which becomes part of the Torah), the third Torah portion ends with the verse ‘*And they told him all of Yosef’s words... and the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived*’.<sup>90</sup> (According to alternative custom, this is the end of the fourth portion.)<sup>91</sup>” The significance of this is explained there at length, and this is indeed the practice in 770.

## MOTZOEI SHABBOS, EVE OF 12 TEVES

Shabbos ends at 5:21 pm.

Following Maariv, anyone who has not recited *kiddush levanah* this month should do so tonight while wearing fine clothes (or while still dressed in his Shabbos clothes).

## FRIDAY, TEVES 17

Regarding the beginning of the secular year, see the *yechidus* to Mr. Peter Kalms in *Guidance from the Rebbe*.

## SHABBOS PARSHAS VAYECHI, 18 TEVES

### “SHABBOS CHAZAK”

During today’s Torah reading, it is customary to rise for the reading of the final verse in the book of Bereishis, after which the entire congregation (men, women, and children) calls out loudly and joyfully—*chazak, chazak, venischazeik!* This shout symbolizes the strength of the Jewish people in all matters of

90) 45:27

91) *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 30, p. 224

Torah—with the additional strength of a *chazakah*.

The one who is called to the Torah for the seventh *aliyah* should join the rest of the congregation in proclaiming *chazak*. This is not considered an interruption in the reading, because it is considered part of the final verse's reading process.

It is customary for the *gabbaim* to organize a special *farbrengen* on this Shabbos, beyond the ordinary Shabbos *farbrengen*. They should use this opportunity to discuss and encourage strengthening of all aspects of Torah and mitzvos.

On this Shabbos, it is customary to increase in *divrei Torah* and to rejoice at having completed an entire *sefer*, and to make resolutions to increase in Torah study and to keep the mitzvos in the best possible way.

In *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Vayechi 5750*, the Rebbe cautioned: “Strong encouragement is particularly necessary in this *shul* (770). It is necessary to clarify that the participants in the present *farbrengen* have not fulfilled their obligation of holding a special *farbrengen*. I am therefore forced to emphasize and encourage, because I do not want them to depend on me, claiming that due to the present *farbrengen* there will not be a special *farbrengen* held by the *gabboim* in honor of Shabbos Chazak.”

## MOTZOEI SHABBOS, EVE OF 19 TEVES

“... Starting with the festive meal of *motzoei Shabbos* ... ‘The meal of Dovid, King Moshiach’ ... Certainly, then the *melave malka* should be truly magnificent! Moreover, and this is the most crucial point, we should hold the meal with Dovid King Moshiach at our head!”<sup>92</sup>

## SUNDAY, 19 TEVES (DIDAN NOTZACH)

During these weeks (from when we begin reading the book of *Shemos*), the order of fasting, praying, and extra stringencies known as *shovavim* begins. In leap years, these stringencies are extended and are referred to as *shovavim tat*. To view this practice in the light of Chabad Chassidus, see *Sefer Hasichos 5749* and other sources.<sup>93</sup>

92) *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Vayechi 5752*

93) *Sefer Hasichos 5749*, fn. to p. 185. Also see *Igros Kodesh* vol. 18, p. 259, and *LeSheima Ozen* p. 130.