

Rabbi Dr. Aharon Adler



## THE TRUTH ABOUT YOM TOV SHEINI

**T**he Biblical commandment to organize the halachic calendar, via the judicial act of lunar sanctification, caused much difficulty for the burgeoning Jewish communities of Babylon during the Second Temple era. The over two-week delay in receiving this critical information from the Holy Land regarding precisely which day was sanctified as Rosh Chodesh meant that the Diaspora communities were uninformed as to when the festivals would fall out. This triggered the rabbinic institution to observe “*Yom Tov Sheini*” – a second day of each festival – due to the halachic doubt generated by the lack of adequate communication. In Talmudic times, when there were no longer possibilities of a judicial act of lunar sanctification, the 19-year calendar was launched into its historic orbit. Today, there is no longer a *safek* regarding the precise day of Rosh Chodesh. One simply checks the annual calendar, and the information is readily available to all. The Talmud (Beitza 4b) states that we nevertheless continue to observe it in the Diaspora as a *minhag*.

Overseas travel in the modern era has given rise to an age-old question regarding the status of Diaspora Jews temporarily residing in Israel vis-à-vis their obligations to observe – or not to observe – *Yom Tov Sheini* as practiced abroad. A parallel situation – entirely reversed – deals with Israelis residing temporarily abroad. Should they observe the festivals in “*Eretz Yisrael mode*” without *Yom Tov Sheini*, or should they conform to the local Diaspora practice?

Great confusion over this issue exists due to the two known polar-opposite opinions on the subject.

Rambam (Hilchot Yom Tov 6:14) and later, Rabbi Yosef Karo (Shulchan Aruch OH 496:3), contend that *Yom Tov Sheini*

observance today conforms to the category of *minhag*. Broadly stated, if an individual is a temporary resident in, or visitor to, a second location with plans to return to the original location, he/she must observe the *minhag* of the original location. However, if one relocates permanently to the second location, the original location’s *minhag* is no longer binding upon him, and he assumes the new location’s *minhag* immediately. Hence, one may conclude that a tourist in Israel today should observe the full *Yom Tov Sheini*. Conversely, an Israeli abroad could dispense with *Yom Tov Sheini* (except for the concern of *marit ayin*, which would restrict such a person from publicly performing Yom Tov-restricted activity).

On the flipside, the Ritba (*Chidushim* Rosh Hashanah 18a) contends that *Yom Tov Sheini* is defined in terms of the place. Whoever is in *Eretz Yisrael* (permanently or temporarily) observes one day, while everyone in the Diaspora would observe two days of Yom Tov. This opinion was adopted by the 17<sup>th</sup> century Chacham Tzvi, who goes a step further and declares that anyone observing *Yom Tov Sheini* in *Eretz Yisrael* is in direct violation of the Biblical commandment “not to add on to the Torah” (*bal tosif*)!

On the practical side, tourists in Israel who are followers of the opinions of the Mishnah Berurah and Rav Moshe Feinstein conduct themselves according to Rav Yosef Karo’s position, and observe the full-blown *Yom Tov Sheini*. Those following the opinions of Rav Yosef D. Soloveitchik and many leading Israeli decisors have adopted the position of the Chacham Tzvi, and observe the Yom Tov in accordance with *Eretz Yisrael* practice.

In 1973, as a foreign student at Yeshivat Har Etzion, two of my friends had asked for Rav Amital to host a second *Seder*

for them. He graciously agreed, on the condition that I come to this *Seder* with my guitar and play live music. Rav Amital refused to respond *Amen* to the two boys’ many *berachot* at this *seder*. Instead, he mumbled: *od beracha levatala* – another blessing in vain!

Complicating matters, Rav Shmuel Salant (19<sup>th</sup> century Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem) agreed, in principle, with the Ritba’s position. However, in deference to Rav Yosef Karo, he recommended that on *Yom Tov Sheini* in *Eretz Yisrael*, one should abstain from doing Yom Tov-restricted activity while maintaining the *Chol HaMoed* status of the day, an opinion adopted by Rav Soloveitchik as well.

The reconstitution of the Sanhedrin on the eve of Messianic times will usher in an era when rabbinic authority will be restored, allowing for the repeal of *Yom Tov Sheini*. Modern telecommunication will guarantee worldwide knowledge of the Rosh Chodesh declarations emanating from *Eretz Yisrael*, and hence, no longer will there be a need for *Yom Tov Sheini* at all. May we be blessed, speedily in our days, to witness this great transformation. Amen!

Rabbi Dr. Aharon Adler is the Rabbi of the Ohel Nechama Community Synagogue in Jerusalem.



A member of the Mizrahi Speakers Bureau  
[mizrachi.org/speakers](http://mizrachi.org/speakers)