



# 25 RULES FOR PERFORMING MITZVOHS

ECLECTIC TORAH COMPILATIONS

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ראובן בראונר

[brauner1@actcom.net.il](mailto:brauner1@actcom.net.il)

— TALMUDIC BOOKS —



**Revised**

# **25 RULES FOR PERFORMING MITZVOHS**

**BASED ON  
CHAYEI ODOM PART I, KLAL 68**

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[brauner1@actcom.net.il](mailto:brauner1@actcom.net.il)

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**Cover page design by Avromie Brauner**

[abebrauner@gmail.com](mailto:abebrauner@gmail.com)



# **25 RULES FOR PERFORMING MITZVAHS**

**This monograph has been revised and corrected, and  
supersedes all previous versions.**

# **25 RULES FOR PERFORMING MITZVAHS**

## **Summary of Rules for Performing Mitzvahs (Commandments)**

1. You must not pass over an opportunity to perform a Mitzvah.
2. Mitzvahs must not be despicable for you.
3. Mitzvahs must not be made into "bundles".
4. When in the midst of performing one Mitzvah, you are exempt from going to perform another one.
5. You should perform each Mitzvah in the most beautiful way you can.
6. You should perform a Mitzvah at the earliest time possible.
7. It is better to perform a Mitzvah yourself than by means of an agent.
8. You should always perform the entire Mitzvah and not just a portion of it.
9. You should have the intent that you are fulfilling a Mitzvah when you are in the process of performing it.
10. A Mitzvah must not come about as a result of a transgression.
11. Any Mitzvah which can be performed with other people should be done with others, and not alone.
12. You should perform a Mitzvah meticulously with all its details and particulars.
13. You should have no greater joy than in the performance of a Mitzvah.
14. You should run and pursue Mitzvahs.
15. You should eagerly await the next opportunity to perform a Mitzvah.
16. You should not do a Mitzvah without paying for it.
17. You should perform Mitzvahs because of your love of God.
18. You should also perform Mitzvahs out of your fear of God.
19. You must perform a Mitzvah even if you have to spend a tenth of your wealth.
20. You should particularly do those Mitzvahs other people are not doing.
21. Things may ascend in holiness, but may not descend from holiness.
22. A positive commandment defers a negative commandment, but one positive commandment does not defer a positive and a negative commandment.
23. It is forbidden to add anything to the existing Mitzvahs.
24. The law of the branch.
25. The one who performs Mitzvahs properly will know no evil.

# 25 RULES FOR PERFORMING MITZVAHS

## 1. YOU MUST NOT PASS OVER AN OPPORTUNITY TO PERFORM A MITZVAH

You must perform whichever Mitzvah you come across first.

You must not leave one Mitzvah aside to perform another Mitzvah, even if you intend to perform the first one at a later time.

Certainly, you must not set one Mitzvah aside to perform another one, and then not return to do the first for that would be in violation of a Torah prohibition, as it says, "You shall observe the Commandments". From the punctuation of the words "the Commandments" (in the Hebrew) we learn that you should not put a Mitzvah aside and allow it to become old (past its time), and surely, you must not let a Mitzvah get "stale" by delaying its performance to a later time.

The prohibition of "Passing over a Mitzvah" is applicable only when the three following conditions are present:

### 1. You have before you two Mitzvahs which you want to perform at the same time.

- a. If you have time to do both Mitzvahs, do whichever Mitzvah comes into your hands first.

**Example:** You wish to put on your Tallis and your Tefillin: put on whichever comes to your hand first (as when reaching into the bag).

- b. If you do not have time to perform both Mitzvahs, perform only the more "serious" of the two.

**Example:** You only have time to wear either Tzitzis or Tefillin, but not both. In such a case, you should put on your Tefillin for it is the more serious of the two since it has a higher sanctity and is an "obligation of the body".

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c. Do the Mitzvah which occurs more frequently first.

**Example:** Tallis (worn every day) is donned before Tefillin (worn only on weekdays).

d. If the time for one of the Mitzvahs will “pass” and you will be unable to perform it at a later time, then it is best to perform that one first<sup>1, 2</sup>.

## 2. It is a Mitzvah which you are actually doing yourself.

However, if someone else is performing the Mitzvah and you are merely engaged in the Mitzvah of "Rove Am" (you are part of the mass of people who are there when a Mitzvah is being done), then you may leave and go elsewhere to watch someone else perform another Mitzvah<sup>3</sup>.

## 3. The Mitzvah cannot be performed better at a later time<sup>4</sup>.

Actually, it is unclear from our sources if one should delay performing a Mitzvah to a later time if it will be done in a better way or, regardless, it is still preferable to do it right away.

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<sup>1</sup> The application of this principle in practice is more complex than can be explained in this short monograph as it accounts for the nature and severity of the Mitzvahs and the consequences for not performing one or the other of them. For further details see Chayyai Odom and, particularly, Nishmas Odom (1:68, 1a).

<sup>2</sup> Thus, if you have to either perform Pidyon Haben or Aliyah L'Regel (go up to Jerusalem for the holiday during Temple times), you should perform the latter Mitzvah even though there is a requirement to perform Pidyon Haben on the 30<sup>th</sup> day.

<sup>3</sup> Example: One can stop watching the Kohen Godol on Yom Kippur read his Parsha to go watch the burning of the cow and goat since both are Mitzvahs of Watching.

<sup>4</sup> Although the Chayyai Odom lays down this third condition, confusingly, he then brings the contradictory opinion, as well.

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## 2. MITZVAHS MUST NOT BE DESPICABLE FOR YOU

This means that:

- a. You must not perform a Mitzvah in a light-headed manner or in a dishonorable way.**

**Example:** A ritual slaughterer (Shochet) must cover the blood (Kisui Hadam) of a slaughtered animal with the dirt using his hand or by means of a utensil, and not by using his foot.

- b. You must not be ashamed or embarrassed about performing a Mitzvah nor sacrifice the quality of the Mitzvah in preference to keeping yourself clean.**

Thus, you should not be concerned about getting your hands or body soiled when performing a Mitzvah, and you should not wear gloves.

- c. You must not derive benefit from (the object of) a Mitzvah at the time of the Mitzvah.**

Thus, you cannot use your Tzitzis<sup>5</sup> while they are attached to your Tallis or use the decorations hung in your Succah or eat the Esrog or smell the Hadassim of the Lulav on Succos or benefit from the light of your Chanukah candles or even light a regular candle from a lit Chanukah candle.

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<sup>5</sup> Presumably, for some secular purpose.

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### 3. MITZVAHS MUST NOT BE MADE INTO "BUNDLES" OR "GROUPED TOGETHER"

Two Mitzvahs must not be performed together, since you will be unable to perform each one with the same level of attentiveness and detail.

### 4. WHEN IN THE MIDST OF PERFORMING ONE MITZVAH, YOU ARE EXEMPT FROM GOING ELSEWHERE TO PERFORM ANOTHER ONE

This is true if any effort must be expended in order to perform the second Mitzvah. But, if no special effort is involved in performing the second Mitzvah then, it too, must be done. The Rambam and the Geonim disagree and say that you are exempt from the second Mitzvah even if there is no effort involved in order to perform it.

**Example #1:** “Agents performing a Mitzvah” (Shiluchei Mitzvah) are exempt from sitting in a Succah, and even at night when they are not traveling, because their efforts in finding a Succah might impact the efficacy of their agency. However, if there happens to be a Succah in the place where they are lodging, and they exerted no effort, they must use it.

**Example #2:** A lone grave-digger or someone watching a dead body is exempt from Krias Shema and Tefillah. However, if someone else is with him, he should stop and pray.

**Example #3:** A person is exempt from other Mitzvahs when he is actually going and returning a lost object to its rightful owner. However, if he places the object down in his house with the intention of delivering it at a later time, and even if he is now “guarding” it (which is also a Mitzvah), he is not exempt from performing other Mitzvahs inasmuch as this is not considered being "actively engaged" in a Mitzvah.

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## 5. YOU SHOULD PERFORM EACH MITZVAH IN THE MOST BEAUTIFUL MANNER YOU CAN

You should use all your abilities to perform every Mitzvah in the most pleasant way possible<sup>6</sup>, as it says, "This is my God and I must beautify Him".

You should always pick the best and choicest object available to perform the Mitzvah.

**Example:** When buying an Esrog, if you have two to choose from, you should select the nicest one, and be willing to pay up to a third more than the other. However, if you have already purchased an Esrog, you need not return it for a nicer one if you would have to add more than a third to the price. If you do pay more than a third, you will be rewarded for this in the World to Come.

## 6. YOU SHOULD PERFORM A MITZVAH AT THE EARLIEST TIME POSSIBLE

If today is the day for performing a Mitzvah, it should be performed right away that morning. If the time for the Mitzvah is at night, it should be performed at the beginning of the evening, such as Davening Ma'ariv immediately when the stars appear. This is applicable even if it is done at the "expense" of performing the Mitzvah among a larger group of people<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> And with all your strength.

<sup>7</sup> Thus, it would be better to perform a Bris Miloh early in the morning of the eighth day even though more people will be able attend the Bris at the later time that day.

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### 7. IT IS BETTER TO PERFORM A MITZVAH YOURSELF THAN BY MEANS OF AN AGENT

**Example:** It is better to write your own Sefer Torah than have someone else do it (unless you hire a scribe who will do a better job)<sup>8</sup>.

### 8. YOU SHOULD ALWAYS PERFORM THE ENTIRE MITZVAH AND NOT JUST A PORTION OF IT

As a corollary, if it is you who begins a Mitzvah, then it should be you who completes it.

However, if you are unable to complete the Mitzvah due to uncontrollable circumstances, you do receive credit for having finished it.<sup>9</sup>

### 9. YOU SHOULD HAVE THE INTENT THAT YOU ARE FULFILLING A MITZVAH WHEN YOU ARE IN THE PROCESS OF PERFORMING IT

This refers to a Torah Commandment. However, the fulfillment of a Rabbinical Commandment does not require intention.

Some say that no intent is required in order to fulfill a Mitzvah which entails an act, if it is performed in its proper manner. However, they too agree that Mitzvahs which are only performed orally (by speech) require intent.

**Examples:** You do not fulfill your obligation if you merely read Krias Shema<sup>10</sup> without the intent that you are now performing a Mitzvah or if someone forced you to eat Matzo (on Pesach) and you thought it was a weekday, or if you blow Shofar (on Rosh Hashanah) for music.

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<sup>8</sup> Another example may be the performance of Miloh (circumcision) which should be done by the father, unless the Mohel would do a better job.

<sup>9</sup> Chazal have said that a Mitzvah is called by the name of (attributed to) the person who completes it.

<sup>10</sup> Or "Remembering Amalek".

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But, if you read Krias Shema in the manner you would during prayers, or did eat a piece of Matzo on Pesach, or just blew the Shofar on Rosh Hashanna, or simply waved a Lulav and Esrog on Succos, even without intending to fulfill a Mitzvah (at that time), you do, in fact, fulfill the Mitzvah.

Someone who performs a Mitzvah expressly not to fulfill the Mitzvah, does not fulfill it.

### 10. A MITZVAH MUST NOT COME ABOUT AS A RESULT OF A TRANSGRESSION

This rule is from the Torah, as it says, "If a person among you shall offer", which comes to exclude stolen property.

**Examples:** No Mitzvah is performed when wearing stolen Tzitzis or eating stolen Matzoh or waving a stolen Lulav, etc<sup>11</sup>.

Many people are very cautious and distance themselves from any circumstance where there might be something stolen involved in a Mitzvah.

### 11. ANY MITZVAH WHICH CAN BE PERFORMED WITH OTHER PEOPLE SHOULD BE DONE WITH OTHERS AND NOT ALONE

For the glory of God is multiplied when Mitzvahs are done with large groups of people<sup>12</sup>, as it says, "The glory of God is found among the masses".

Our Sages have said that there is no comparison between a Mitzvah performed by the many with one performed by the few.

### 12. YOU SHOULD PERFORM A MITZVAH METICULOUSLY WITH ALL ITS DETAILS AND PARTICULARS

<sup>11</sup> This may only apply when the Mitzvah is from the Torah.

<sup>12</sup> Example: Sanctifying the New Moon.

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### 13. YOU SHOULD HAVE NO GREATER JOY THAN IN THE PERFORMANCE OF A MITZVAH

### 14. YOU SHOULD RUN AND PURSUE MITZVAHS

**Examples:** It is a Mitzvah to run to the Synagogue and to the Study Hall.

You should exert great effort in the performance of Mitzvahs, for your reward is commensurate with your effort.

### 15. YOU SHOULD EAGERLY AWAIT THE NEXT OPPORTUNITY TO PERFORM A MITZVAH

### 16. PREFERABLY, YOU SHOULD NOT DO A MITZVAH WITHOUT PAYING FOR IT

Rather, you should acquire the object of a Mitzvah for its full price<sup>13</sup>.

### 17. YOU SHOULD PERFORM MITZVAHS BECAUSE OF YOUR LOVE OF GOD

You should not perform a Mitzvah simply because it appeals to you or because of some benefit you may derive from it.

You should not perform a Mitzvah because you feel obliged to do so and wish to absolve yourself of it, and feel that it is a burden for you.

Rather, you should perform the Mitzvah out of love, and feel that even if you would not have been commanded to perform it, you would have yearned to do it anyway.

You do it because this is what pleases God, and this is His will.

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<sup>13</sup> It is better to buy an Esrog than to receive one for free.

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### 18. YOU SHOULD ALSO PERFORM MITZVAHS OUT OF YOUR AWE AND FEAR OF GOD

Even common-sense (sagacious) Mitzvahs, such as Positive Commandments like charity and honoring parents, and Negative Precepts such as theft and illicit interpersonal relations should not be performed or avoided simply because they are rational and make sense.

Rather, you should perform them because of your awe and fear of the God Who commanded you to observe these matters.

### 19. YOU MUST PERFORM A MITZVAH EVEN IF YOU HAVE TO SPEND A TENTH OF YOUR WEALTH

- but not more than twenty percent of your wealth.

This is the rule even for a *transient* Mitzvah, and for Positive Commandments.

However, you must spend all your wealth in order to avoid transgressing a Negative Precept as it says, "and with all your resources (בכל מאודך)".

### 20. YOU SHOULD PARTICULARLY DO THOSE MITZVAHS OTHER PEOPLE ARE NOT DOING

**Example:** Caring for an abandoned corpse (Meis Mitzvah).

If we neglect them, these Mitzvahs cry out, "How terrible we must be that we have been forsaken!" and they will now become Accusers against us.

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### **21. THINGS MAY ASCEND IN HOLINESS, BUT MAY NOT DESCEND FROM HOLINESS<sup>14</sup>**

For this reason worn-out “Objects of Holiness” are archived, such as old Mezuzahs, Tefillin and their straps and bags, and certainly Torah Scrolls and its accoutrements.

Although, technically, “Objects Used for a Mitzvah” such as Tzitzis<sup>15</sup> and Succah, etc. may be discarded once their Mitzvah is over, they should not be used for something ignominious, such as using a worn Tallis for some secular purpose. Rather they should be packed away or burned.

Similarly, it is forbidden to store old books, Talleisim, Tefillin (which have a lower sanctity [than a Sefer Torah]) or the Tzedokoh Box in an Aron Kodesh (which has a high sanctity), and certainly not to put money therein.

### **22. ONE POSITIVE COMMANDMENT DEFERS ONE NEGATIVE COMMANDMENT. BUT ONE POSITIVE COMMANDMENT DOES NOT DEFER BOTH A POSITIVE AND A NEGATIVE COMMANDMENT<sup>16</sup>**

The first statement is said when you cannot perform both the positive and negative Mitzvahs (and must choose only one to observe). But where you can perform both of them, the positive commandment does not defer the negative commandment.

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<sup>14</sup> Objects which were used for or had a high-level of holiness must not be used for a lower level purpose.

<sup>15</sup> Worn-out Tzitzis is referred to here.

<sup>16</sup> Refer to Chayyai Odom for certain exceptions to this rule.

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### 23. IT IS FORBIDDEN TO ADD ANYTHING TO THE EXISTING MITZVAHS

This is only true if you intentionally wishes to add a "Mitzvah", such as saying that it is a Mitzvah from the Torah, even the Oral Torah, to sit in the Succah on Shemini Atzeres or that it is a Mitzvah to eat Matzoh on the Eighth day of Passover or if you wear both Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam Tefillin simultaneously and say that both are Kosher<sup>17</sup>.

However, if you merely sit in the Succah on Shemini Atzeres or eat Matzo on the Eighth day of Passover because of the doubt that this might actually be the Seventh Day or wear both pairs of Tefillin at the same time because you are in doubt and say that if one is Kosher than the other is not, it is permitted.

But someone who wears two sets of Tefillin, that of Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam at the same time, or takes two Kosher Lulavs at the same time is in violation of "Adding" even if he did not intend to add.

You may also not add to a Mitzvah, such as adding a fifth string to your Tzitzis or a fifth passage to your Tefillin.

However, you may perform the same Mitzvah repeatedly on one day, such as taking up your Lulav and Esrog, even a hundred times, on Succos. But, you must not say that it is a Mitzvah from the Torah to perform this Mitzvah all day long. Saying this is a violation.

Just as it is forbidden to add to the Mitzvahs, it is forbidden to subtract from the Mitzvahs, such as making Tzitzis out of three strings or taking only three species on Succos.

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<sup>17</sup> It is one or the other.

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### 24. THE LAW OF THE BRANCH

Some Mitzvahs have an auxiliary, “Branch” Mitzvah, which, if possible, should be performed first, even though failure to do so does not impair the primary Mitzvah.

But, if there is no possibility of doing the Branch Mitzvah first, and since it is not a hindrance to the performance of the primary Mitzvah, you may perform the primary Mitzvah straight-away.

**Example:** When bringing a Sacrifice, Semichoh (laying of the hands) must antecede Shechitoh (slaughtering), but if Semichoh was not done, it will not disqualify the validity of the Sacrifice.

### 25. THE ONE WHO PERFORMS MITZVAHS PROPERLY WILL KNOW NO EVIL

You should not do Mitzvahs hastily and abruptly.

Rather, you should perform them cautiously and with forethought.

You should prepare yourself in advance for their performance and not do them hurriedly and in a sudden rush, for one who does so will be unable to perform the Mitzvah properly.