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Shehecheyanu, New Clothes, and Renovations During S'firat HaOmer

Question: May one buy and wear new clothes, do work on his house, and recite Shehecheyanu during the s'firat ha'omer period?

Answer: The gemara¹ discusses the halachot of aveilut (mourning) for a deceased relative and for the national mourning over the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash during the period before Tish'a b'Av. However, the minhagim of national mourning during s'fira over the death of Rabbi Akiva's students are not found in the gemara. There are both overlap and differences between the rules for these different periods of mourning.

Regarding the aveilut of the s'fira period, the Shulchan Aruch² mentions prohibitions on marriages and hair cutting (as well as on work after sunset, but this is not widely accepted). The Mishna Berura³ further mentions the minhag of not dancing, which many have extended to include refraining from all forms of instrumental music.⁴ These standard sources make no mention, in the context of sefira, of the practices about which you inquire.

Let us look briefly at minhagim regarding Shehecheyanu, new clothes, and work on the house as they appear in the context of the period before Tish'a b'Av. One should curtail certain activities before Tish'a b'Av, including building projects,⁵ but according to the Shulchan Aruch,⁶ this applies only during the Nine Days and not throughout the entire Three Weeks.⁷ There is also a recommendation, which not all accept,⁸ not to recite Shehecheyanu during the Three Weeks.⁹ The logic is that the b'racha of Shehecheyanu expresses our gratefulness for having made it to “this time”, which may not be appropriate at such a particularly sad time of the year.

¹. See *Ta'anit* 29b.

². *Orach Chayim* 493.

³. 493:3.

⁴. See *Igrot Moshe*, *Orach Chayim* I:166.

⁵. *Yevamot* 43a.

⁶. *Orach Chayim* 551:2.

⁷. See response D-18.

⁸. See opinions in *Mishna Berura* 551:98.

⁹. *Shulchan Aruch* op. cit. 17.

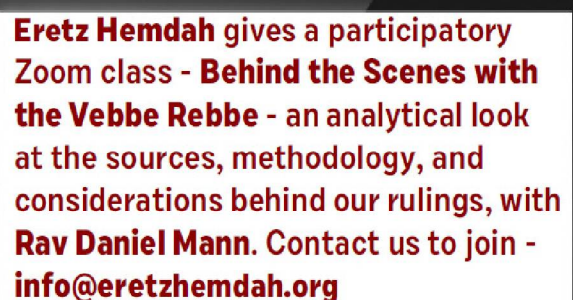
While the standard sources do not mention these issues during the s'fira period, there are some sources that do, especially in regard to reciting Shehecheyanu.¹⁰ There is basis to extend these prohibitions to the s'firat ha'omer period on two grounds. First, there is logic in doing so, as this is a nationwide sad period (as opposed to aveilut over a relative, the sad nature of which is only personal¹¹). Second, it is relatively easier to transfer minhagim when there is a model for such halachot, by doing, so to speak, a “copy and paste” from one time period to another (i.e., from the Three Weeks to sefira).

However, paradoxically, the logic and the model are also reasons to ignore the minority strict opinions and the practice of some to refrain from some or all of the matters you mentioned. The reason is that people may have gotten confused as to which practices apply when. They remembered that there is a concept of not saying Shehecheyanu and not doing renovations during national mourning periods, and they may have heard of someone knowledgeable who says to act this way during s'fira. They then may have started adopting the practice, but not based on a decision with knowledge of the sources and a desire to accept the stringency. Rather, they thought these

are the standard minhagim. This is called a minhag ta'ut. In such a case, even one who has already followed the stringent practice may suspend it without hatarat nedarim.¹²

Rav Ovadia Yosef has an interesting approach to these questions. First, he explains¹³ that one cannot call s'fira, which is actually the bridge between the joyous holidays of Pesach and Shavuot, a tragic period of time, as we term the period leading up to Tish'a b'Av. Therefore, he is against refraining from recitation of Shehecheyanu on fruit at that time. He is not, however, against the stringency to avoid wearing new clothing that warrants Shehecheyanu, out of extra mourning. Regarding moving into a new home or doing work on an existing one, he unequivocally permits the matter.¹⁴ The Tzitz Eliezer¹⁵ is perhaps more resolute in rejecting stringency in these matters.

Thus, one need not be stringent with regard to the practices you mention. If one has acted stringently in the past, he may continue if he likes, but he should consider whether his (family's) practice is more based on confusion than on a conscious decision to accept minority stringencies.



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¹⁰. See several opinions cited in *Bein Pesach L'Shavuot* 16:(2).

¹¹. See *Mishna Berura* 551:98.

¹². *Shulchan Aruch* and Rama, *Yoreh Deah* 214:1.

¹³. *Yechaveh Da'at* 1:24.

¹⁴. *Ibid.* III:30.

¹⁵. XVIII:41.