

The Wandering Jew

August 24, 2023

**Q** We'll be in a bungalow colony for Shabbos, and I don't know where the *tchum* ends. How far can I go when taking a walk on Shabbos afternoon?



**A** The Gemara (Eiruvין 42a), discussing a traveler who stops somewhere for Shabbos and doesn't know where the *tchum* ends, says he may calculate it by counting 2000 footsteps, as the average man's walking stride length is one *amah*; the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 397:2) rules accordingly. The Biur Halacha (399:1) says that if possible, more precise measurements should be taken before Shabbos. If you plan to take a short walk—significantly less than 2000 *amos*—the footstep method may be relied upon even *lechatchilah*, because the likelihood of error is low (*ibid.*). Someone taller or shorter than the average man should adjust the step count proportionally (*ibid.* 397:2).

When counting footsteps, bear in mind that hills and valleys are measured as if they were flat (O.C. 399). So if you are climbing or descending, you may go farther than 2000 footsteps, because you haven't traveled 2000 *amos* laterally. But it's not practical to incorporate this factor, as the halachic guidelines for measuring hills are complex (see also Nesivos Shabbos 43 note 64).

Some *poskim* ask how the Gemara could allow the footstep method, given that *medidah* (measuring) on Shabbos is forbidden other than for a *dvar mitzvah* (O.C. 306:7). The Radvaz (cited in Sha'arei Teshuvah) answers that measuring the *tchum* is considered a mitzvah purpose. But the Mishnah Brurah (*ibid.* 5) says counting footsteps is only permitted if the purpose of the walk is itself a Shabbos need. Therefore, in practice, you should take a shorter stroll rather than counting footsteps, unless the purpose of the walk is to address a mitzvah need.