

THE SHABBOS WEEKLY

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Parshas Vayeishev/Chanukah 5763

I heard that one is forbidden to tie a sailor's knot on Shabbos, but are not all knots forbidden?

In order to answer your question we need to lay down the foundation of this *sugya*. The pertaining *Mishna* and *gemora* can be found in *Shabbos* 111b-112a. We find that the major *Rishonim* differ over the understanding of the *sugya* and hence the ramifications greatly vary.

The *Halacha* subdivides the tying of knots on Shabbos into three categories: 1) Knots that are Biblically prohibited to tie, 2) Knots that are Rabbinically prohibited to tie and 3) Knots that are permitted to tie.

Ossur mid'oraissos: the *gemora* says – בד'ושקפי (*bid'ushkepi*). *Rashi* explains that the leather worker would insert a strap into the shoe and tie it permanently into place. Since this knot is a permanent one, it is *ossur mid'oraissos*.

Ossur mid'rabanan: the *gemora* says *bid'rabanan* (the student's shoes). *Rashi* explains that the students would tie their shoe straps loosely to their legs enabling the shoes' removal without having to untie the knots. Nevertheless they were not permanent knots, because when walking in mud they would untie the knots and fasten the straps tightly to their legs so that the shoe would not stick to the mud and come off.

Permitted: בני מהוזא (*B'nei Mechoza*). *Rashi* explains that the people of *Mechoza* were meticulous with their clothing and

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would tie the straps tight to the point that they could not be slipped off the leg. Therefore it was not a permanent knot since they would have to fasten and unfasten the shoe straps to their legs on a daily basis. The *Rif* and the *Rambam* add another factor – **craftsmanship**. They see in the *sugya* that for a knot to be Biblically prohibited it must be the type tied by craftsmen. The underlying feature of such a knot is its strength.¹

So where does the sailor knot come in?

The sailor knot is a craftsman's knot *par excellence* and would definitely contribute towards a perpetrator being guilty of a Biblical transgression. However time is a factor as well, as we will see.

The other factor is **time** and according to *Rashi* and the *Rosh* it is the only factor. A knot tied forever – *kayama* – is *ossur mid'oraissos*.

Longer than a week or 24 hours (two opinions) is *ossur mid'rabanan*.

Less than a week or 24 hours (the respective opinions) is permitted.

The synopsis is as follows:

	Permanent	Semi Permanent	< 24 hours < a week
Craftsman's knot	Biblical according to all	<i>Rif</i> and <i>Rambam</i> – Rabbinical	<i>Rif</i> and <i>Rambam</i> – Rabbinical <i>Rashi Rosh</i> – permitted

¹ *Shiltai Giborim* and other *Achronim*.

Lay man's knot	Rif and Rambam – rabbinical Rashi Rosh – Biblical	Rif and Rambam – <i>machlokes</i> ² Rashi Rosh – Rabbinical	Permitted
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There are two opinions as to the **permitted** time factor and *L'chatchila* one should not tie even a simple knot on Shabbos if he intends untying it after 24 hours.

Which of the above opinions is the halacha?

The *Shulchan Aruch (Mechaber)* rules according to the *Rif* and the *Rambam* and The *Rama* rules according to *Rashi* and The *Rosh*, at least *l'chumra*. Accordingly one may only tie a simple knot within the permitted time bracket.

Are most knots permitted because after all most knots are not craftsmen's knots?

Things are not so simple. The *poskim* hold that a strong **double knot** is classified as a craftsman's knot due its sturdiness and strength; hence one may not tie a double knot even for less than 24 hours.

What about a double knot tied in a woman's kerchief or the knot in the handkerchief tied around one's neck, are they also forbidden?

Since the main feature of a craftsman's knot is its strength and these particular knots are not tied sturdily, one is permitted to loosely tie them.³ This would seemingly not apply to tying shoelaces in a double knot owing to the fact that they are fastened tightly.

Vort on the Parsha

The possuk tells us that Yosef's brothers threw him into an **empty pit** and Chazal relate that the pit was lined with snakes and scorpions. This seems to be a contradiction to what the brothers wanted to do. After all, they did not wish to kill him, but throwing one into a pit with snakes and scorpions does not really offer much hope of a grand life.

The Vilna Gaon explains the juxtaposition of two gemoras in Shabbos 21b. The first gemora says that a chanuka light placed above 20 amos is possul because one does not normally look so high. The subsequent gemora is the above-mentioned Chazal – the pit was lined with snakes and scorpions. The Ga'on says that the pit was 20 amos deep (based on another gemora which says that 'throwing' refers to the distance of 20 amos) and since the pit was 20 amos deep and one does not naturally see further than 20 amos,⁴ they did not see the snakes and scorpions!!

Food For Thought

May I tie a knot at the end of my tzizis, after all it is not a double knot?

If one must tie a knot on Shabbos, either for the sake of a mitzvah or for safety reasons, is he permitted to do so?

If the answer to the above is yes is there a restriction as to which type he may tie and which knot not?

Answers coming next week.

² There is a *machlokes* amongst the *poskim* as to when neither of the Biblical factors are present whether it is *osur mid'rabanan* or permitted.

³ *Zachor VeShamor, Hilchos נטלה*, pp 7-8.

⁴ Obviously one sees much further but into a dark pit one does not naturally see the unexpected.

Dedicated in memory of R' Moshe Grossbard, 22nd of Kislev.

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If you would like to send a question to Rav Ostroff, you can write to him at shabbosweekly@shemayisrael.com.

Note: The purpose of this series is intended solely for the clarification of the topics discussed and not to render halachic decisions. It is intended to heighten everyone's awareness of important practical questions which do arise on this topic. One must consult with a proper halachic authority in order to receive *p'sak*.