



Parshas Shoftim 5763

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May one use a sponge when washing oneself on Shabbos?

Squeezing a sponge causes it to expel the water or liquid held within. Although squeezing falls under the umbrella of either *Libun* – laundering or *Dash* – separating, in this case we are only concerned with separating.¹

Many *Rishonim* are of the opinion that *Dash* is transgressed when one squeezes to expel the liquid. We must therefore examine this particular squeezing to see whether *Dash* applies or not.

The process of cleaning oneself with a sponge (or dishes for that matter) requires the area being cleaned to be wet. This is because sponging a dry area will obviously not have the same effect as sponging a wet one.

The advantage of using a sponge or cloth is that it continuously wets the area, which is brought about through squeezing the sponge or cloth during sponging. Consequently, the expelling of the water or liquid within is not merely a *p'sik reisha* (a by-product of the sponging) but a required part of the sponging.

Accordingly we would say that squeezing a wet sponge is *ossur mid'oraisso*.

¹ When sponging oneself one is not laundering the sponge. Although obviously cleaning and laundering the sponge for its own sake would be *Libun*.

Does that mean that all sponges are prohibited?

Basically yes. The only sponge permitted is the kind that does not hold water, such as the special type used to wash dishes on Shabbos. Since it is not practical to use such a sponge on one's body, one should only use one's hands without any sponge.

Where else might we be concerned with this halacha?

A very pertinent case involves cleaning an area prior to the insertion of a syringe. Before inserting a syringe it is necessary to disinfect the area with alcohol. This is usually done by soaking cotton wool in alcohol and rubbing it over the required area. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach writes that this action involves *Dash* because one squeezes the alcohol from the cotton wool thereby wetting the area and enabling one to rub the area clean.² The alternative is to pour alcohol on the arm and rub it clean with a dry piece of cotton wool. The cotton wool should be pre-cut before Shabbos or one should use tissues etc.

This implies that wet wipes are a problem as well.

Wet wipes that are used to clean a baby are also a problem when one wants the expelled liquid in order to clean the baby. One should seek rabbinical guidance in this matter.

² *SS"K* 33:10 and footnote 44.

Is using soap a problem when washing hands and face, for example?

Without getting too involved in the details of using soap on Shabbos, suffice to say that there are various problems involved such as *molid*, i.e. creating a liquid from a solid,³ *Memare'ach* – smoothing, as sometimes one wishes to smooth the soap. The *Mishna Berura* writes that the accepted custom is not to use soap on Shabbos.

Would liquid soap be permitted?

Many *poskim*⁴ permit the use of liquid soap on Shabbos, being that it is already a liquid and one is merely watering it down. However, Rav Moshe Feinstein⁵ was stringent in this respect and therefore one should seek rabbinical guidance and follow the accepted custom in one's area.

Is swimming in a pool permitted on Shabbos?

The same problems that apply to bathing apply to swimming and more. The problems of squeezing hair and carrying water on one's body more than 4 *amos* out of the pool area (or river) are the same as bathing. There is yet another stringency. *Chazal* were concerned⁶ that if one was permitted to float in water on Shabbos one would fashion a type of raft for that purpose, which is an *issur d'oraisa*.

Accordingly, just as one does not bathe on Shabbos even in cold water, so too one does not swim.⁷

³ *M"b simon* 326:30.

⁴ See the *SS"K* 14:16.

⁵ אג"מ ח"א סי' קיג.

⁶ *Simon* 339:2.

⁷ See the *SS"K* 14:12, 16:38.

Vort on the Parsha

The *possuk* tells us that we must eradicate all sources of evil from within our midst (17:7). We often find in the Torah that a person's surroundings influence one's thoughts for the good and for the bad. It is for this reason that witnesses of a crime are the first to punish the evildoer, in order to eliminate the bad impression left by witnessing the crime.

We find that Yitzchok Avinu turned blind from the incense of the idol worship of his daughters-in-law whereas Rivka Imeinu did not. Rashi tells us that it is because she witnessed idol worshipping in her father's home. This is amazing because she left her father's home when she was 3 years old and her daughters-in-law were burning incense approximately 130 years later. Nevertheless we see that it left an indelible impression on her soul which prevented her from becoming blind.

The Torah wants us to live in pristine spiritual surroundings so as not to mar the saintliness of our souls.

Food For Thought

What is the halacha with regards to using a hot water bottle on Shabbos?

Is one permitted to immerse oneself in a mikveh on Shabbos?

May one make use of a sauna on Shabbos?

What about using a sauna after Shabbos that was heated on Shabbos?

Answers coming next week.

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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.