



Parshas Chayei Sarah 5764

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May one clean dirty fingernails on Shabbos?

Dirt often appears under fingernails, leaving an ugly appearance. Obviously there is no prohibition against cleaning such dirt on Shabbos; one should be careful not to scrape away part of the inside of the fingernail, which would be a problem of גזוז.¹

As we know, one's hands and fingernails must be clean when washing for bread and when necessary one could use a wooden toothpick that will scrape away the dirt but will not scrape the nail.

A fingernail has partially separated from the nail, may it be removed?

We have learnt that removing a fingernail involves the *melacha* of גזוז – shearing.² The *halacha* regarding a semidetached fingernail varies.

If a minor part of the fingernail is detached, it is the same as a fully attached fingernail and may not be removed. If a major part of the fingernail has detached, *mid'oraisso* it is viewed as if it has totally detached, but *mid'rabanan* it may only be removed – by hand or teeth – if causing distress. The leniency is due to the fact that *Chazal* did not

institute this *g'zeira* (decree) in occurrences of distress.³

May a woman remove nail varnish on Shabbos?

Removing nail varnish is not similar to removing dirt from one's skin etc. The problem in this case is that removing nail varnish paves the way for a fresh painting which is a problem of “erasing in order to repaint”, which can be an *issur d'oraisso*. Normally a woman only removes varnish that has started to peel or is damaged. Doing so on Shabbos is not seen as *mekalkel* (destroying or spoiling) which is only a *d'rabanan*,⁴ because in this case the nails are being cleaned in order to be repainted.

How is a woman supposed to wash her hands for bread on Shabbos when the nail varnish is peeling?

This is a major problem because it is a state which is known as being *makpidah*, which means being particular. Anything that a person does not want on one's hands constitutes a חציצה – a barrier between the person's hands and the water and in this case it invalidates the נטילת ידיים.⁵ It is similar to any case of dirt on one's hands that must be removed before washing for bread. Although one may remove

¹ *Bi'ur Halacha simon 161:1 ד"ה הוא צריך*. *SS"K* 14:56.

² In the previous shiur we saw that *Tosefos* holds that cutting fingernails is only a *d'oraisso* when one needs the fingernails and the *Rivash* holds that beautifying oneself is also a *d'oraisso*.

³ *Simon* 328:31 and *M"B* 95-96.

⁴ See the *עט הערה* פ"ד תיקונים ומילואים.

⁵ *Simon* 161:1.

‘normal’ dirt from one’s hands on Shabbos in order to do נטילת ידיים, removing varnish is far more problematic, as explained. One should therefore make sure that the fingernails are either well varnished or clean before Shabbos.

Is one permitted to peel a scab on Shabbos?

The *Shulchan Aruch* says that one may peel scabs on Shabbos. The ⁶ קצות השלחן explains that since scabs eventually fall off the skin, they are in a better *halachik* position than skin peelings (cuticles), and therefore they may be removed even when they do not cause distress. One must not remove or peel scabs when it will cause bleeding because that is prohibited. ⁷

What about removing or cutting a wart?

Warts are part of one’s skin and may therefore not be removed or cut from one’s body on Shabbos. ⁸ Warts share the same rule as regular pieces of skin that may not be pulled or yanked off one’s skin.

May a girl braid her hair on Shabbos?

Aside from the issue of pulling out hair on Shabbos, which is a problem of גוזז, there is a problem of making plaits. *Chazal* tell us that making plaits or braiding hair on Shabbos is associated with *Boneh*. *Chazal* learnt this from the fact that *Hashem* presented *Chava* to *Adam Harishon* with her hair in plaits, because it says וַיִּבֶן אֶת הַצֵּלַע – He built the *Tzela*. A girl may also not unravel plaits because that would be a problem of dismantling – *Soter*. Nevertheless

it is only an *issur d’rabanan* as it only **appears** like *Boneh*. ⁹

Vort on the Parsha

Avraham Avinu, the epitome of *chessed*, was seeking a daughter-in-law of similar nature. We most often do *chessed* together with judgment, says Rav Pinkus זצ”ל, i.e. we judge a person who asks for charity thinking that he deserves such-and such, and another person such-and-such.

Avraham did not pass judgment. He fed his guests to the utmost without any reserves whatsoever. Even though to him they were merely Arab wayfarers, he treated them like kings.

Rivka, like her future father-in-law, did not judge Eliezer and say that he has servants who are fully capable of drawing water from the well. On the contrary, she did *chessed* until the maximum. A 3 year old girl drew water for Eliezer and for the camels without any restraints.

Now that is something to try and aim for. To emulate them is basically impossible but at least we should know which direction to take.

Food For Thought

How many letters must one erase in order to be liable to bring a korban?

If two letters in a sefer Torah are touching, may one erase the point where they touch?

May children play with a writing board, which is comprised of a plastic sheet which when lifted erases the letters?

May children write letters on such a board?

Answers coming next week.

⁶ R’ Chaim Na’eh, ס”י קל”ו סי”ד בבדה”ש סקכ”ב.

⁷ SS”K 35:31.

⁸ *Simon* 340:2.

⁹ *Simon* 303:26 and SS”K 14:52.

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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.