



Parshas Vayechi 5765

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Under what conditions may ointments and salves be applied on Shabbos?

There are two main issues to consider when dealing with the application of ointments, creams and salves¹ on Shabbos. The first, and less severe is to determine whether one may apply medicinal ointment, i.e. is one considered "ill" which will warrant the application, or is one only slightly ill, in which case medication may not be applied on Shabbos.²

Can you state briefly the conditions that would justify applying ointment on Shabbos?

There are quite a few cases: a baby with a skin or diaper rash; an infection that requires ointment on a regular basis; an eye infection and burns. This is as far as the *heter* of using ointments and salves goes.

What is the second issue?

The second concern, which is also the more severe one, is the method of application. One of the 39 *melachos* is called *Memachek*, which means smoothing. In the *Mishkan* they would smooth the animal skins and hides by removing the hairs and fats. One of the *tolados* of this *av* is *memar'each* – smoothing a salve onto a bandage or onto

the skin.³ Being that a *toladah* is also a biblical prohibition, smoothing a thick salve onto a bandage or onto skin involves the violation of a *d'oraisso*, and hence its severity.⁴

So how is one to apply an ointment in the permitted manner?

The obvious solution would be to put the ointment onto the desired area without smoothing it. This can be accomplished by squeezing out of a tube directly onto the desired area, all the while taking care not to smooth it onto the skin. If the salve or cream is in a tub, one should use a spoon or stick and put it onto the desired area without smoothing.

After throwing or placing the salve onto a dressing and tying the dressing onto the wound, there is a possibility that the salve will even out, is that permitted?

Since one does not intentionally smooth the salve, and if it does it is *b'shinui*, it is permitted.⁵

May a doctor switch on his otoscope⁶ on Shabbos?

The problem with switching on the light of the otoscope (the instrument for looking in

¹ Whenever we write "creams" in this shiur, it refers to ointments and salves as well.

² Based on *simon* 327.

³ *Rambam* 11:6.

⁴ See *M"B* 328:81.

⁵ *SS"K* 33:14 and footnote 63.

⁶ The instrument used for looking into ears.

an ear) is that it is an *issur d'oraissa*. Any light bulb that has a filament which turns “red hot” when turned on involves the *melacha* of *hav'arah*, and is comparable to switching on a light in a room.

In order to permit such an action, we would have to be dealing with a case of *pikuach nefesh* or at least *safek pikuach nefesh* (possible life danger).

Obviously this must be determined by medical experts and we will only present a case as an example. One should consult a doctor for all cases. According to what I heard from a doctor, a baby until the age of 6 months, with severe earache and a fever, might be considered a case of *safek pikuach nefesh*, because infection can lead to many more severe complications.

The alternative would be to have a gentile switch on the light, which is more preferable, or the doctor should switch on the otoscope light with a *shinui*, either with his teeth or with the aid of a spoon etc. In this manner, he has ‘only’ violated an *issur d'rabanan* which is permitted in the case of an ill person.

May the doctor switch it off after using it?

The *issurim* involved with switching the light off are *soter* (breaking the current – according to the *Chazon Ish*) and *Mechabeah* – extinguishing, but only *mid'rabanan*. The reason to permit same is because if a doctor would need the otoscope again that Shabbos, and it would not have been switched off, it is possible that the battery would fail.

The answer to this question would depend on how often one sees two patients with ear ailments on the same Shabbos and therefore it cannot be answered in a general manner. A doctor should ask one's rav as how to go about this. Even when it is permitted, it

must be done *b'shinui* in order to minimize the *issur*.

Vort on the Parsha

We bless our children with the *b'racha* – may you be like Efrayim and Menashe. This is not to say that their piousness is higher than the other tribes, but it is they who survived and triumphed in the defiled land of Egypt. We therefore bless our children that they should also remain steadfast in their yiddishkeit, wherever they are.⁷

Food For Thought

What about taking sleeping tablets on Shabbos?

Is one permitted to make a compress on Shabbos?

What about putting a sprained ankle into a bowl of warm water?

Answers coming next week.

⁷ *Sefer Chochmah V'da'as*, Rav Moshe Sternbuch *shlita*.