



THE SHABBOS WEEKLY

HALACHA SERIES ON HILCHOS SHABBOS

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If the flowers fell out of the vase on Shabbos may one return them?

One may not return flowers to water on Shabbos even if they fell out on Shabbos.¹ On the other hand, one may return branches without flowers to water on Shabbos.² The difference is that flowers bloom in water and returning them causes the flowers to bloom, which is similar to planting. It is unclear what the *halacha* is when the flowers are already blooming and are open, וצ"ע, *Sh'miras Shabbos Kehilchasa* 26 footnote 91.

May one add water to the flower vase on Shabbos?

Chazal did not permit us to add water to a vase on Shabbos and were even more stringent with regards to changing the water. Both these actions are prohibited on Shabbos on account of exerting oneself unnecessarily on Shabbos. Therefore, if the vase is nearly empty or it has a dirty color one may not add water or change it.³ One **may** add water to a vase on Yom Tov.⁴

A guest arrives on Shabbos (there is an eiruv) or on Yom Tov with a bunch of flowers, may you put them in water?

As mentioned, flowers may never be placed in water on Shabbos or Yom Tov due to their blooming. If however the guests arrive with fragrant branches and the like which do not have flowers, the *halacha* is that one may **not** put them

in water on Shabbos and Yom Tov. One may instruct a gentile to put them in a vase that has water prepared before Shabbos.⁵

	Return flowers	Return branches	Put flowers or branches	Add water	Change water
Shabbos	ossur	permitted	ossur	ossur	Ossur
Yom Tov	ossur	permitted	ossur	permitted	Ossur

May one remove an avocado pit from water on Shabbos?

It is common to place an avocado pit into a jar filled with water and watch it grow. It is forbidden to remove the avocado pit from the water for the following reasons: if the pit has already sprung roots, the pit is considered as 'planted' in the water and removing it would involve the *melacha* of קוצר – reaping; if roots have not as yet sprung forth, because it was placed in the water in order to grow, it is considered 'planted' and may not be removed from the water.

What difference does it make whether there was intention to plant it or not, isn't it enough that it is in water to prohibit its removal?

¹ Rama and M"B *siman* 336:54.

² M"B *ibid*.

³ M"B *ibid*. it is based on the *Shulchan Aruch* in *siman* 654, *Hilchos lulav*.

⁴ SS"K 26:26, based on *siman* 654.

⁵ This is because some *poskim* hold that even a Jew may put branches in a vase that has water in it before Shabbos (see *Sha'ar Ha'tsiun* 48). Although we do not rely on that opinion for ourselves but to instruct a gentile we may rely on it.

We find in the *Shulchan Aruch*⁶ a case where people were accustomed to deposit fragrant leaves in soil a day before Shabbos in order to keep them fresh, with the intention of removing them on Shabbos. The *Shulchan Aruch* rules that they may be removed if 1) they have not yet sprung roots and 2) if there was **no intention** to plant them. The *Mishna Berura*⁷ explains that when one intended to plant them and then decides to remove them from the soil, one might not realize that they have already sprung roots. Therefore *Chazal* prohibited the removal of leaves, grains etc. from soil (or water) when there was an intention to plant them, even though they have not yet sprung roots.

The kitchen sink is blocked! Is one permitted to use a plunger to unblock it?

There are two ways to view this problem. One way is to say that an entirely blocked drain or sink is considered *broken* and therefore unblocking it will be repairing, which is forbidden on Shabbos. Another way is to say that it is not considered broken as the pipes are merely blocked and unblocking the drain is not called repairing the pipes.

Harav Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל⁸ is of the opinion that a (totally) blocked pipe is comparable to not having a pipe at all and unblocking it is like making a new opening. It is therefore *ossur* to unblock. One may however instruct a gentile to unblock it when very necessary.

Several other *poskim* share the same view as Rav Moshe.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach זצ"ל⁹ is of the opinion that we cannot say that the pipe is non-existent, and therefore unblocking a blocked pipe is not considered as repairing anything.

Being that it is a *machlokes*, one must ask for rabbinical guidance in such an event.

May I pluck a hair that is bothering me, from my head on Shabbos?

Cutting hair on Shabbos falls under the umbrella of the *melacha* of גזז – shearing. The *Shulchan Aruch*¹⁰ teaches us that it is prohibited to cut or pluck hair, whether one uses an instrument, such as scissors, or one's fingers.

There is a difference though as to the severity of the action: one is only *chayav* (biblically prohibited) when cutting hair with an instrument and rabbinically prohibited when pulling out hair with one's fingers, in view of the fact that it is not the normal manner for removing hair.¹¹

Another crucial issue is the number of hairs that need to be cut. For one to violate an *issur d'oraisso* (biblical prohibition) and be liable for the biblical punishment, one would need to cut at least two¹² hairs. Although cutting a single hair is also an *issur d'oraisso*¹³ one is not subject to the punishment prescribed by the Torah.

Consequently, pulling out even a single hair is an *issur d'rabanan* (pulled out as opposed to cut) and it may not be done on Shabbos.

Orchos Chaim LaRosh

לבטוח בה' בכל לבבך ולהאמין בהשגחתו הפרטית – Trust in *Hashem* with all your heart and believe that He is guiding you constantly. How should we bring *Hashem* into our lives? How do we make it real? *Rabeinu Yonah* in his *peirush* on *Mishlei* writes that before attempting to do anything one must ask *Hashem* for *siyata dishmaya*, even for trivial things such as going to the store and getting on a bus. After one has been successful one must thank *Hashem* and not attribute the success to one's own talents. When seeking *Hashem's* guidance before and after, one incorporates *Hashem* in one's life.

⁶ *Siman* 336:6.

⁷ *Siman* 336:40.

⁸ אג"מ ח"ד סי' מ' אות ט'.

⁹ A letter from Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach quoted in the שו"ת משנה הלכות ח"ו סי' פ"ג. It can be found in the *Binyan Shabbos* page 303.

¹⁰ *Siman* 340:1.

¹¹ *M"b siman* 340:2.

¹² *Mechaber* *ibid*.

¹³ *M"b siman* 340:3. It complies with the rule of חצי שיעור אסור מן התורה.

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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.