

THE SHABBOS WEEKLY

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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 **גָזֹב** – shearing. The *Shulchan Aruch*¹ 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 rabbincally prohibited when pulling out hair with one's fingers, in view of the fact that it is not the normal manner for removing hair.²

Another crucial issue is the number of hairs that need to be cut. For one to violate an *issur d'oraissos* (biblical prohibition) and be liable for the biblical punishment, one would need to cut at least two³ hairs. Although cutting a single hair is also an *issur d'oraissos*⁴ 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.

Is the cutting of two hairs always a melacha d'oraissos?

We find a *machlokes* between the *Tosefot* and the *Rivash* in this matter.⁵ We must not forget that the source of this *melacha* is shearing sheep, and hence *Tosefot* says that in the *Mishkan* the sheep were sheared for their wool. Therefore, cutting hair for a purpose other than for the purpose of acquiring the hair itself, renders the

cutting a *melacha she'aina tsricha l'gyusa* – meaning that it is done for a motive other than that of the *Mishkan*. According to the *halacha* it would then only be an *issur d'rabanan*.

The *Rivash*, on the other hand, learns that this *melacha* was also practiced in the *Mishkan* for the purpose of cleaning the skins of hair. The hair was not used or wanted and nevertheless it is a *melacha*. Consequently, cutting hair for appearance sake will be a regular *melacha d'oraissos*.

Does it make a difference whether it is a white hair from black and that I am a male?

It does indeed make a difference. If we said that the basis of the *melacha* is two hairs, when removing a single white hair from amongst black or vice versa, one accomplishes a complete goal and is *chayav* on account of that single hair.⁶ The *Bi'ur Halacha* says that some are of the opinion that one is *chayav* for **pulling** out such a hair, as it is normal to do so.

Being male compounds the problem because it is prohibited for a male to pluck a black hair from white or vice versa during the week as well, since it is an act of beautification, typical of women. This is the implementation of the *issur* of **לא ילבש** גבר שמלה אשה, which includes beautifying oneself as women do.⁷ There are extenuating circumstances where this is permitted, and one must ask one's *rav* when this is.

What about picking at fingernails on Shabbos?

¹ *Siman* 340:1.

² *M" B siman* 340:2.

³ *Mechaber ibid.*

⁴ *M" B siman* 340:3. It complies with the rule of **חצ' שיעור אסור מן התורה**.

⁵ See the *Bi'ur Halacha* 7. ה"ה וה'יב.

⁶ *Mechaber ibid.* The *Bi'ur Halacha* discusses this issue according to the opinions who learn that the *melacha* is only when one needs the cut hair, as it seems that it should not be prohibited to any further extent when it is a white from black.

⁷ *Mechaber ibid* and *M" B* 340:7.

Cutting a fingernail is also part of **ריגג**. Cutting fingernails with an instrument is an *issur d'oraissos*⁸ and picking them is an *issur d'rabanan*. A person who habitually picks or bites fingernails during the week is in danger of violating the Shabbos, because he will most likely continue with his (bad) habit on Shabbos as well.

Is there a problem to remove 'feather remnants' from a chicken in my plate?

Removing feathers from a dead chicken is an *issur d'oraissos*.⁹ Yet we find a *machlokes haposkim* as to whether it applies to a cooked chicken as well.

The *Sh'miras Shabbos Kehilchasa*¹⁰ cites *poskim* who hold that it is *osur*, but also cites lenient opinions. Rav Moshe Feinstein¹¹ is of the opinion that it is totally permitted.

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 **ריגג**.¹²

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 **ריגג** – shearing.¹³ 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'oraissos* it is viewed as if it has totally detached, but *mid'rabanan* it may only be removed

⁸ According to the *Rivash* mentioned above.

⁹ *M"B simon* 340:5, towards the end.

¹⁰ Chapter 3 comment on page 48 and footnote 83.

¹¹ *Iggros Moshe Orach Chaim* Vol. IV page 141

¹² *Bi'ur Halacha* simon 161:1 **ה הוא צרי** 7. *SS"K* 14:56.

¹³ In the previous shiur we saw that *Tosefos* holds that cutting fingernails is only a *d'oraissos* when one needs the fingernails and the *Rivash* holds that beautifying oneself is also a *d'oraissos*.

– 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.¹⁴

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'oraissos*. 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*,¹⁵ 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 **חיצת נטילת ידיים** – a barrier between the person's hands and the water and in this case it invalidates the **נטילת ידיים**.¹⁶

It is similar to any case of dirt on one's hands that must be removed before washing for bread. Although one may remove '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.

Orchos Chaim LaRosh

להרחק גאוה וכעס – estrange haughtiness and anger. One usually gets angry when things do not unfold according to one's plans, which stems from haughtiness, because who said things must be according to what you want.

¹⁴ *Simon* 328:31 and *M"B* 95-96.

¹⁵ See the *ערעה עט*.

¹⁶ *Simon* 161:1.

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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*.