



LAWS OF SHABBAT - CLASS #25



ISSUES OF REMOVING HAIR, SKIN AND NAILS.

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Shorn any sheep recently?

Probably not.

That's okay – with Gozez,¹ our 12th melacha, we're about to learn about how to get from wool to fabric. This labor category opens the second major grouping of melachot, known as the "Order of Garments."² These melachot detail the process of making fabric, from the shearing of the wool until the finished fabric.

As we've mentioned earlier, each prohibited melacha (labor category) is based on an activity that took place in the Mishkan (the Tabernacle). The curtains in the Tabernacle were made of fabric, woven from animal wool.³



Within the 'Order of Garments', there are three groups of labor categories.

- The first four melachot deal with obtaining and preparing the wool. These are: Gozez (shearing), Melaben (cleaning), Menapetz (combing), and Tzovaya (dyeing).
- The next group, containing five melachot, deals with the actual weaving process, by which the wool is made into something you can wear.

¹ Pronounced goh-ZAYZ (Sephardic) or GOH-zayz (Ashkenazic).

² This is Rabbi Ribiat's term. 39 *Melochos*, v.2, p. 669 and 673.

³ See Exodus 26:7. Some authorities maintain that there was another use of Gozez in the Tabernacle: The *tachash* (a special animal that existed only in biblical times whose hide was used for an added covering of the Tabernacle) had to have the hair trimmed off of it. See the opinion of Ran and Rivash, cited in Biur Halacha 340:1 - s.v. "V'Chayav." Also, wool was used for the special garments worn by the Kohanim while serving in the Tabernacle.

- The last group (of four melachot) discusses types of labor done with fabrics, including tying and untying knots, sewing, and tearing.

That's the big picture. Now on to Gozez.

Basics of Gozez

In order to produce these fabrics, the first step was to shear the wool from the animal. So, the classic act of Gozez would be shearing your sheep's wool on Shabbat.⁴ Extending this idea, the Sages taught that **any removal of something that grows upon a living being** is also considered an act of Gozez.

How does this principle apply in daily life?

To review, Gozez means:

- removing a part of the body
- that grows
- from any living being
- in the normal manner

Here's the rule: The item being cut off must be something "separate" from the organism (like hair and nails, and not an actual limb) and must be something that grows back.⁵

For humans, the three things that grow on our bodies are **hair, skin and nails**.⁶ Therefore, if we cut any of these on Shabbat, we are engaging in a Torah-prohibited act of Gozez.

⁴ During biblical times, sheep-shearing was a festive occasion; see (Genesis 31:19; 38:12,13; 1-Samuel 25:4-8,36; 2-Samuel 13:23-28). It is a mitzvah to give the first shearing of sheep to a Kohen (Deut. 18:4).

⁵ See R'shsh - Eruvin 103a; responsa *Torat Chesed* quoted in *Yecha've Daat* 6:53.

⁶ Mishnah Berurah 340:7

What if you remove the hair (or skin or nails) not 'in the normal manner' – e.g. by biting it off, rather than cutting with an instrument like a scissors or nail clipper? Though this *shinui* reduces the act from the realm of a Torah prohibition, removing hair, skin or nails in a non-normal manner is still not allowed, based on rabbinic decree.⁷

Let's look more closely at each of these issues.

A Hair-Raising Topic

Brushing Hair



It's Shabbat morning and you're headed for shul. You are ready to leave when you realize you would like to brush your hair. As you reach for the brush, you pause for a moment.

It might seem that brushing hair is not a problem of Gozez. After all, we brush hair so it will look good, not in order to "remove it." However, almost all of the time, some hair will come out during brushing.⁸ As a result, this activity falls within the category of Gozez.

There is a halachically acceptable way to avoid this dilemma. Brushing hair may be done on Shabbat if you satisfy all of the following:

- (a) a very soft brush is used
- (b) you brush gently
- (c) you brush only at the surface of the hair, not close to the scalp, **and**
- (d) the brush you use is designated for Shabbat use only⁹

⁷ Recall that a general rule of the melachot of Shabbat is that many behaviors are considered prohibited by the Torah only when they are performed in the normal way. On this issue relative to Gozez specifically, see Mishnah Berurah 340:2; *39 Melochos*, p. 673-680.

⁸ Recall in Lesson #2, we discussed the idea of *Psik Raisha*: When your action will inevitably result in a labor that is not allowed on Shabbat, you can't do that action – even if you don't intend for the prohibited labor to take place.

⁹ Mishnah Berurah 303:86; *39 Melochos*, p. 676-7. Using the same brush as the weekday is a problem of *Uvdah D'chol* (a weekday activity).

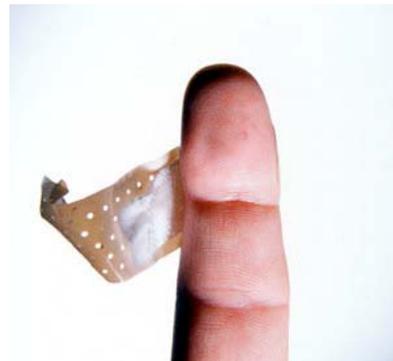
The first three conditions are aimed at avoiding the activity of Gozez; the fourth condition is imposed to create extra awareness that Shabbat brushing is different than weekday brushing.

Combing hair on Shabbat is always prohibited, since it is virtually impossible to avoid removing hair when combing.

Beard – Let's consider another, similar issue: stroking one's beard. In this case, one would need to be careful to do so only *gently*, so that hairs do not fall out in the process.

Plucking eyebrows, or removing a gray hair – These activities are prohibited on Shabbat, whether by hand or with an instrument.

Removing a Band-Aid – Can you remove a band-aid from a part of your body that is covered by hair? The simple answer would be no, because hair will certainly be pulled out. The solution is to apply some vegetable oil or olive oil, in order to dissolve the adhesive and get the band-aid to slide off without any pulling.¹⁰ However, if there is discomfort and no other way, one may remove it.¹¹



Gum – What if chewing gum got stuck in your hair? Of course you could not forcibly remove the gum, since hair will inevitably be pulled out. Here's a simple solution (that helps on weekdays, too): Apply ice to the gum, which will cause it to harden and lose most of its stickiness. After a few minutes, the gum will slide off without pulling hair.

Wigs – May a woman brush a wig on Shabbat? In this case the halacha permits it – certainly if the wig is made from *synthetic*

¹⁰ Mishnah Berurah 312:20; *Shemirat Shabbat K'Hilchato* 35:29

¹¹ *Shemirat Shabbat K'Hilchato* footnote 73, quoting Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach. The rationale is that this is an "abnormal" way of removing hair, and it is an "unwanted" result.

materials (since this does not fit the basic Gozez definition of “something that grows upon a living being”), or even if it is made from human hair. Why? Because these hairs have already been removed from their original “source of growth.” Yet, because of other halachic problems, one should still use a soft brush.¹²

Fur Coat – Regarding Gozez, furs are not similar to wigs, since furs are still attached to the source of original growth. The Sages note that Gozez applies even if the being is not actually alive when the removal takes place.¹³ Therefore plucking hair from a fur coat would be a biblically-proscribed act of Gozez.¹⁴

Bird feathers – The basic halacha is that one may not pluck feathers from a bird, whether dead or alive. But what about removing a feather stub that you find still attached to cooked chicken?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein writes that it is permissible to remove these feathers, since once they have been cooked with the chicken, they no longer have a fitting use. (As for the issue of Borer, the feathers are considered a ‘barrier’ to getting to the food.)¹⁵

The Skinny on Skin

Like hair and nails, skin is a part of the body that grows (or more precisely, regenerates). So the principle behind Gozez applies here, and cutting, biting off, or removing pieces of dead skin is prohibited.¹⁶

One should, therefore, not remove any skin, cuticles or scabs from one's body. Nor should one bite off the loose skin from chapped lips.¹⁷

¹² *Shemirat Shabbat K'Hilchato* 14:46.

¹³ Rambam (Shabbat 9:7); *39 Melochos*, p. 675.

¹⁴ Mishnah Berurah 340:5, also see Aruch HaShulchan 336:35.

¹⁵ *Shu"t Igros Moshe* (Orach Chaim 4:74, Borer 9). This is similar to one who does not want to eat chicken skin, and may therefore remove the skin in order to get to the meat.

¹⁶ Orach Chaim 340:2. On all three of these examples, see Biur Halacha 340 s.v. ‘Yabelet’; *39 Melochos*, p. 681.

Dandruff – It is prohibited to scratch one's head if it will cause attached dandruff to fall. However, it is permitted to remove completely loose dandruff.¹⁸

Splinter – Can one remove a splinter that is under the surface of the skin? If the splinter is causing pain, then one may cut into the outer surface of the skin (being careful not to cause unnecessary bleeding)¹⁹ to the point where one can reach it with tweezers. One should be careful to only *cut* the skin and not *detach* it.

Nails

In general, it's good to get into the routine of cutting your nails (and trimming cuticles) before Shabbat. It is, in fact, a mitzvah to cut your fingernails on Friday in honor of Shabbat.²⁰

Biting nails – In general, nail-biting is discouraged, especially since it may lead to biting fingernails on Shabbat, which is not allowed.²¹

Nevertheless, the halacha does not consider 'biting' to be the normal manner of cutting nails (even if it might be your normal manner). As a result, biting nails is not prohibited on Shabbat by Torah law – but it is still prohibited by rabbinic law.²²

¹⁷ See Biur Halacha 340:2, s.v. 'Yabelet' who explains that it is especially problematic to bite skin off lips with the teeth – because that is the normal way it is done. To chew and swallow one's chapped lips even on a weekday may also be a problem – see Rambam (Ma'acholot Asurot 4:21); *Sh'ailat Yavetz* 1:41.

¹⁸ *Shemirat Shabbat K'Hilchato* 14:43, based on Orach Chaim 328:22.

¹⁹ Mishnah Berurah 328:88; *Shemirat Shabbat K'Hilchato* 35:17. This would violate the melacha of Shochait; see upcoming lesson #33.

²⁰ Orach Chaim 260:1

²¹ Rabbi Shimshon Pincus zt"l called biting fingernails on Sunday through Friday as "transgressing Shabbat during the week" (*chillul Shabbat bechol*), due to the high probability of accidentally doing the same on Shabbat.

²² Recall that a general rule of the melachot of Shabbat is that many behaviors are considered prohibited by the Torah only when they are performed in the normal way. On this issue relative to Goez specifically, see 39 *Melochos*, p. 673-680.

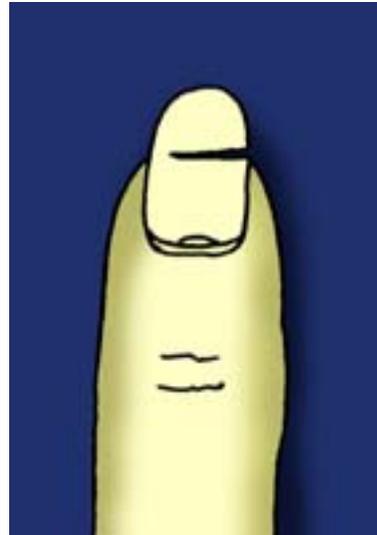
Hang-nails

Sitting at home on a Shabbat afternoon, you realize that you have a 'hangnail' (a part of your nail that has become detached). It is uncomfortable and even painful. During the week, you would simply clip it or gently pull it off. What about today?

This scenario appears straightforward. Why *would* you be allowed to remove the hangnail, if nail-clipping is considered *Gozez*?

Here, two factors make it possible to get rid of the offending nail:

1) If the hangnail is already majority detached (i.e. more than halfway of its width), the halacha views it as about to come off on its own.²³



2) Halacha is sensitive to physical discomfort, and allows certain leniencies to relieve it.²⁴

So if you are bothered by the hangnail, and it is majority detached, you are permitted to gently remove the hangnail in a 'non-normal manner' – that is, by using your hands, rather than an instrument.²⁵

This lenient ruling does not apply to loose or dead skin.²⁶

²³ "A nail that is mostly detached is considered detached." Therefore, removing it is only forbidden on a rabbinic level. Orach Chaim 328:31.

²⁴ Mishnah Berurah 328:96; 39 *Melochos*, p. 681-82. By contrast, if you are not bothered by the nail, you would need to leave it alone. See Orach Chaim 328:31, according to *Ktzot HaShulchan* 143:1 and *Shemirat Shabbat K'Hilchato* 14:54; also see *Shonei Halachot*.

²⁵ Keep in mind that even under these conditions, you should not remove the hang-nail in a manner that it would be inevitable that you will draw blood. This would be a problem of *Shochait*, a future *melacha* which we will discuss. See *Pri Megadim* (Mishbetzot Zahav 328:23); *Shemirat Shabbat K'Hilchato* 14:54 (147).

Big picture

To sum up:

- Gozez (shearing) is a labor category with a number of fairly common applications – cutting hair, brushing hair, removing dry skin, biting nails.
- Under Torah law, Gozez means removing a part of the body that grows from any living being, in a normal manner.
- The Sages also prohibited activities which are similar to Gozez, such as shearing in a non-normal manner; as with other melachot, they did this so as to prevent confusion and avoid having people inadvertently transgress Torah law.

²⁶ Biur Halacha 340, s.v. 'Yabelet.'