

## A Kosher Shave

### The *Halachot* of Shaving

#### Adapted by Rabbi Ariel Ovadia[1]

**Q: I know I can't shave my entire face with a razor, but are there any spots on my face that may be shaved with a razor?**

**A:** Shaving the five corners of one's face with a razor is a Biblical prohibition based on the verse: *"V'lo tash'hit et pe'at zekanecha"* – *"and thou shall not destroy the corner of your beard"* (VaYikra 19:27, see also VaYikra 21:5). The *Shulhan Aruch* (YD 181:11) explains that since there are multiple opinions as to the exact parts of one's face that are considered the corners one should not shave anywhere on one's face with a razor (see also *Rama* YD 181:10). The *Rama* adds (based on Rabbenu Hananel) that this includes not shaving one's throat.

The prohibition against shaving the corners of one's face (*Pe'ot*) differs from that of not rounding the corners of one's head, in that one is permitted to remove the hair of their beard so long as they do not use a razor, whereas one may not shave off the corners of one's head at all. The *Rama* (ibid.) adds that while one may use scissors to shave one's face, the blade which is cutting must be the one further from one's face and one must make certain that the sharp blade does not come into contact with one's skin. (based on *Terumat HaDeshen* 295).

**Q: May electric shavers be used to shave one's beard?**

**A:** There are two viewpoints on this issue as noted by Rav Belsky zt"l (*Shulhan HaLevi* p. 126 – 127):

*"The use of electric shavers has been a subject of much debate amongst the Poskim. There are many Gedole HaPoskim, past and present, who have declared that shavers are prohibited in the same manner as razors. The reason for this view is that the Torah does not prohibit any*

*particular shaving device, but rather prohibits the act of shaving (Giluah) and destroying the hair (Hash'hata). Hachamim determined that a razor accomplishes both Giluah and Hash'hata, and therefore cannot be used. The shaving machine used nowadays accomplishes both Giluah and Hash'hata and should be forbidden on a Torah level, in the same manner that a razor is forbidden."*

*"The other view amongst the Poskim maintains that only the Giluah and Hash'hata of a razor is prohibited by the Torah. They understand that Hachamim identified the razor as the only tool to which the prohibition applies. According to this view, there is a fundamental difference between a razor and scissors in the way the hair is cut. A razor cuts the hair directly, due to the sharpness of the blade. Scissors operate in an entirely different manner, squeezing the hair between two opposing blades. The hair is cut by virtue of the pressure applied to it, and not due to the sharpness of the blade. Consequently, the Poskim who allow the use of shavers maintain that scissors may be used, even if the resulting trim is exactly the same as that of a razor (Misparayim K'En Ta'ar). Most (mechanical) shavers consist of a set of tiny opposing blades or surfaces that cut the hair in the manner of scissors. According to this second viewpoint, nearly all shavers are permissible."*

*"The Shulhan Aruch (YD 181:10) adheres to the second view and permits shaving with any scissor-like device,*

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even if it results in a shave which is similar to that of a razor. In the United States, as well as many other places, the view that prevailed was that of Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l, who also differentiated between the cutting action of scissors and that of a razor, thus permitting the use of most electric shavers."

**Q: My friend told me that he just brought his new electric shaver to his rabbi to have it checked as to whether it's kosher. Is he being overly scrupulous or can there be an issue with the Kashrut of some electric shavers?**

The *Terumat HaDeshen* (295) is of the opinion that it is forbidden to use a pair of scissors if the lower blade (the one close to the skin) is sharp enough to cut the hair by itself were it to be used as a razor. The *Rama* (YD 181:10) accepts this stringency of the *Terumat HaDeshen*. Thus, if we were to find a shaver where the surface that touches the skin is so sharp that it is capable of cutting the hairs in the manner of a razor, it would be forbidden to use this shaver according to the *Terumat HaDeshen*.

According to Rav Belsky zt"l (*Shulhan HaLevi* pg, 127 – 128) this would be true even if the actual cutting is accomplished by the movement of the blades along the inside of that surface in the manner of scissors. In this vein, he ruled that since rotary blade shavers and straight vibrating blade shavers do not contain any razor-sharp pieces and operate strictly on a scissor principle they satisfy the requirements of the *Terumat HaDeshen* and are thus permitted for use.

On the other hand "micro-screen" shavers may be problematic, since some companies claim that the screen itself is razor-sharp (and the surface of the screen is against the skin), with the internal blades pressing the hairs against the sharp edges of the screen's perforations. Rav Belsky writes:

*"This presents a formidable problem according to the Terumat HaDeshen. Even according to those who argue with this stringency, if the micro-screen is sharp enough that hairs could be cut by simply sliding it along the skin, it might be classified as a full-fledged razor".*



While Rav Belsky zt"l felt that the companies' claims as to the razor-sharpness of the micro-screens are "unsubstantiated" he concludes, "Nevertheless, one who is reasonably cautious might still want to refrain from using "micro-screen" shavers because of the companies' claims." (ibid p. 128)

Concerning the "lift-and-cut" shavers, Rav Belsky writes:

*"The 'lift-and-cut' shaver presents more of a problem. Based on the company's description, these shavers possess an internal double-blade, the first of which catches the hair and then pulls it beyond the screen and into the shaver. The second blade is then able to cut the hair (by itself without the use of the screen, which is not a scissor action)... Accordingly, it might be forbidden to shave with such devices, even according to the Shulhan Aruch (who permits a scissor-like shave), and certainly according to the Terumat HaDeshen. Removing the hair-catching spring blade would eliminate these concerns..." (ibid p. 128)*

Based on the complexities mentioned above Rav Belsky felt that one should have his shaver approved by a competent *Halachic* authority to make certain that it is a "kosher" shaver.

**Sources:** [1] From the OU Kosher Halacha Yomit

## ***Ma'aser Funds for Communal Needs***

***By Dayan Yosef Greenwald***

***Q: May one use Ma'aser money to support communal services or institutions that require the support of everyone in the community, such as a Mikveh, a Shul, or an Eruv?***

According to the rules of *Hoshen Mishpat*, such support should in fact be obligatory upon all members of the community. Consequently, if the building of the shul needs improvement, such as the lobby needs to be painted, or the bricks are falling apart, then everyone can be compelled to contribute to the costs.

This is similar to the status of *Shutafin* – partners – who must bear these types of costs equally, as described in

the *Shulhan Aruch* (HM 163). This obligation is similar to home owners' associations of neighborhoods, developments, or apartment buildings where all owners contribute equally to a fund which pays for maintenance, landscaping, renovations etc. A community works in the same manner, and all must do their part. Therefore, funds contributed to these causes cannot be considered *Tzeddaka* and *Ma'aser* funds may not be used.

It should be noted that this refers to communities or situations where an obligation is imposed on the members to pay for these causes. However, if such payments are optional, then one would be allowed to make donations from *Ma'aser* funds, provided that one stipulated to do so when initially undertaking the commitment.

***Q: May one consider paying for a seat in a shul for Yamim Nora'im (where one is not a member of a specific shul, or the shul does not charge regular dues) from Ma'aser money?***

Here too, one is paying for a service, i.e., the seat and the *Minyan* in which to pray for on *Rosh HaShana* and *Yom Kippur*, and cannot be considered a simple donation. In addition, this money may also go to fund the salary of the rabbi and other expenses. Therefore, one would not be permitted to do so.

However, Rav Eliashiv and Rav Chaim Kanievsky are quoted as saying that any value paid above the strict value of the seat may be paid with *Ma'aser* funds[1].

The *Halacha* may be different, though, where one attends a few different shuls, and he is not required to give dues or buy a seat (as he is praying elsewhere). In that case, since he is not obligated to pay, but does so of his own free will to express his gratitude to the shul for its services, then the payment is optional, and *Ma'aser* funds may be used.

***Q: May one use Tzeddaka funds to pay for a reservation or ad for a school or shul dinner?***

Here too, the rules should be similar to the cases outlined above. If the school or institution mandates that families purchase an ad in the journal, or purchase a dinner reservation, then it is considered an obligation, and regular funds must be used. However, if it is not required, or if one donates more money than is necessary, one would be able to count those funds as *Tzeddaka*.

In such cases, if one attends a dinner that costs \$360, for example, and the meal and other expenses (e.g., the band and the speaker) only costs \$150, one could deduct those amounts (as that is paying for a service) and pay the rest from *Ma'aser* funds. Some say a Chinese auction may also be counted, except for the amount of money that one would have spent to have a chance to win the prizes being offered regardless of the *Tzeddaka* component.

#### **Sources:**

[1] "*The Laws of Tzedakah and Maaser*" p.166

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