

**Folk Remedies: May They Be Carried On Shabbat?
Are they EVER OK? When and when not, and why?**

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Daf Yomi Study

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(Shabbat 66b - 67b)

MISHNA: Young boys may go out on Shabbat with knots as a folk remedy ... **And any person** is permitted to go out on Shabbat with those objects; **however, the Sages spoke in the present**, addressing situations that were prevalent.

GEMARA: We learned in the mishna that young boys may go out on Shabbat with knots. The Gemara asks: **What are these knots? Adda Mari said that Rav Naḥman bar Barukh said that Rav Ashi bar Avin said that Rav Yehuda said: They are garlands of the madder plant that are tied for their medicinal qualities.**

Abaye said: My mother said to me about the healing properties of madder: **Three garlands maintain** the illness at its present state and prevent it from worsening, **five garlands heal** the illness, and **seven are effective even against sorcery.**

Rav Aḥa bar Ya'akov said: And that benefit provided by the madder plant is specifically in a case **where** one on whom the knots were tied **does not look at the sun and the moon, and does not see rain, and hears neither the sound of clanging iron, nor the sound of the hen, nor the sound of footsteps.** **Rav Naḥman bar Yitzḥak said:** If that is the case, the remedial powers of **the madder fell in a pit**, i.e., if so many conditions exist, for all intents and purposes it provides no benefit at all.

The Gemara asks: If these knots in the madder plant have remedial qualities, **why specifically** were **boys** mentioned in the mishna? **Even girls** can benefit from the cure **as well.** By the same token, **why specifically** were **young boys** mentioned in the mishna? **Even adults** can benefit from the cure **as well.**

Rather, what are these knots? Like that which Avin bar Huna said that Rav Ḥama bar Gurya said: A son who has longings for his father and has a difficult time leaving him, the father takes a strap from the right shoe and ties it on the boy's left arm as a talisman to help the child overcome his

longings. These feelings are more common in small children and especially in boys for their fathers, as fathers were more involved in raising their sons than they were in raising their daughters. Therefore, the Sages allowed specifically young boys to go out with these knots. With regard to this practice, **Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak said: And your mnemonic** for where to tie the strap is **tefillin**, which are tied by the right hand on the left arm. **And the opposite**, tying the strap from the left shoe onto his right arm, **is dangerous** because it will exacerbate his longings.

On the topic of the use of various forms of healing and medicinal practices and their permissibility on Shabbat, the Gemara cites additional statements by that Sage on these topics. **Avin bar Huna said that Rav Hama bar Gurya said:** With regard to **overturning an empty cup** in which there had been hot water and placing it **on one's navel** for healing purposes **on Shabbat**, he may **well** do so.

And Avin bar Huna said that Rav Hama bar Gurya said: It is permissible to smear oil and salt on oneself on Shabbat.

As in this case of Rav Huna, who departed from the house of Rav, and Rav, who departed from the house of Rabbi Hiyya, and Rabbi Hiyya, who departed from the house of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, when they were drunk, they would bring oil and salt and rub them on the palms of their hands and the soles of their feet and say: Just as this oil is clear, so let the wine of so-and-so, son of so-and-so, his mother, become clear. In other words, let them become sober. **And if he could not bring oil and salt, or if they did not work, he would bring the sealing clay of a barrel and soak it in water and say: Just as this sealing clay is clear, so let the wine of so-and-so, son of so-and-so, become clear.**

And Avin bar Huna said that Rav Hama bar Gurya said: It is permitted to tightly bandage the neck of one whose vertebra was dislocated in order to reset it, on Shabbat.

And Avin bar Huna said that Rav Hama bar Gurya said: With regard to tightly **swaddling a baby** born **on Shabbat** in order to align any limbs that may have been dislocated in birth, one may **well** do so.

...

The Gemara cites additional statements said by Abaye in the name of the woman who raised him with regard to remedies. **Abaye said, Mother said to me: All incantations** that are repeated **are** intoned using **the name of the mother** of the one requiring the incantation, **and all knots** tied for the purpose of healing **are tied on the left.**

And Abaye said, Mother said to me: All incantations for **which** the number of times they must be intoned **is specified**, one recites them **as they are specified; and those** for **which** the number of times they must be intoned **is not specified**, one recites them **forty-one times.**

The Sages taught in a *baraita*: **One may go out with a preservation stone**, which prevents miscarriages, **on Shabbat. They said in the name of Rabbi Meir** that one may go out **even with the counterweight of a preservation stone**; i.e., a stone or another object that was weighed against and found equivalent to the weight of the preservation stone, which is also effective. **And** this leniency applies **not** only to **a woman who miscarried** in the past and is concerned that she may miscarry again; **rather**, it applies even to a woman who never miscarried and is concerned **lest she miscarry** for the first time. **And** it applies **not** only to **a woman who** is aware that she **is pregnant**; **rather**, it applies even if a woman suspects that **she may become pregnant and miscarry. Rav Yeimar bar Shelamya said in the name of Abaye: And this** applies only **when** he happened upon an object **that was** found **equal** to the preservation stone when **he weighed** it against that stone, not when one alters the object to equal the weight of the preservation stone. **Abaye raised a dilemma**: With regard to a **counterweight to the counterweight**, i.e., one who finds an object and determines its weight by weighing it against the counterweight of the preservation stone, **what** is its legal status? May a woman go out into the public domain with it? The Gemara concludes: **Let** this dilemma **stand** unresolved.

And Abaye said, Mother said to me: To heal a fever of one day, let one take a pale, i.e., newly minted, **dinar and go to the salt pools, and weigh its weight in salt** against it, **and let him bind** the salt **to the opening of the neckline** of his garment **with a thread** made of hair.

And if this remedy is not effective, let him sit at a crossroads, and when he sees a large ant carrying something, he should take the ant and place it in a copper tube, and close it with lead, and seal it with sixty seals, and shake it, and lift it, and say to it: Your burden is upon me and my burden,

my fever, **is upon you.** Rav Aḥa, son of Rav Huna, said to Rav Ashi: **And perhaps a different person already found this ant and used this remedy to end his illness!?** In that case, by accepting the burden of the ant, he is bringing another's illness upon himself. **Rather, let him say to the ant: My burden and your burden are upon you.**

And if that remedy is not effective, let him take a new jug, and go to the river, and say to it: "River, river, lend me a jug of water for a guest who happened to come to me." And let him turn it around his head seven times, and pour out the water behind him, and say to it: "River, river, take back the water that you gave me because the guest who happened to come to me came on its day and left on its day."

Rav Huna said:

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For tertian fever (a form of malaria which afflicts one every third day), **let one bring seven thorns from seven palm trees, and seven slivers from seven beams, and seven pegs from seven bridges, and seven types of ashes from seven ovens, and seven types of dust from seven door sockets, the hole in which the hinge of the door revolves, and seven types of tar from seven boats, and seven cumin seeds, and seven hairs from the beard of an old dog, and let him bind it to the opening of the neckline of his garment with a thread made of hair.**

Rabbi Yoḥanan said: For healing a burning fever, let one take a knife that is made entirely of iron, including the handle, and let him go to a place where there is a bush and tie a string of hair to it.

On the first day, let him carve the bush a little, and recite: "And an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from within the bush and he looked and behold the bush was aflame in fire and the bush was not consumed" (Exodus 3:2). **On the following day, let him carve the bush a little more and recite: "And Moses said: I will turn aside now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burned"** (Exodus 3:3). **On the following day, let him carve the bush a little more and recite: "And the Lord saw that he turned aside to see and God called to him within the bush and said: Moses, Moses, and he said: Here I am"** (Exodus 3:4).

Rav Aḥa, son of Rava, said to Rav Ashi: And let him say: “And the Lord said: Do not come close, take off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). (This verse is more suited to be recited as an incantation to cure a fever.) Hence, rather, on the first day, let him recite the first two verses: “And an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from within the bush and he looked and behold the bush was aflame in fire and the bush was not consumed,” as well as, “And Moses said: I will turn aside now and see.” And on the second day, let him recite: “And the Lord saw that he turned aside to see.” And on the following day, let him recite: “And the Lord said: Do not come close, take off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5).

And when he carves the bush, let him lower himself and cut it close to the ground, and recite as follows: “The bush, the bush; not because you are higher than all trees did the Holy One, Blessed be He, rest His Divine Presence upon you. Rather, it is because you are lower than all trees did the Holy One, Blessed be He, rested His Divine Presence upon you. And just as the fire saw Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah and fled from before them, so too, let the fire of the fever see so-and-so, son of so-and-so, his mother, flee from before him.”

For healing boils, let him recite as follows: “Baz, Bazya, Mas, Masya, Kas, Kasya, Sharlai, and Amarlai, these are the angels who were sent from the land of Sodom and this was all in order to heal painful boils. Bazakh, Bazikh, Bazbazikh, Masmasikh, Kamon, Kamikh, may your appearance remain with you, may your appearance remain with you, i.e., the boils should not grow redder. May your place remain with you, i.e., they should not spread, may your, the boils’, seed be like one who is barren and like a mule that is not fruitful and does not multiply, so too, do not increase and do not multiply in the body of so-and-so, son of so-and-so.”

For healing a wound, let him recite as follows: “A drawn sword and a readied sling, its name shall not be ache, sickness, and pains.”

To be saved from a demon, let him recite as follows: “You were stopped up, stopped up you were. Cursed, broken, and excommunicated be the demon called bar Tit bar Tamei bar Tina as Shamgaz, Merigaz, and Istemai.”

To be saved from the demon of the latrine, let him recite as follows: “On the head of a lion and on the nose of a lioness we found the demon named bar Shirika Panda. With a bed of leeks I felled him, and with the jaw of the donkey I struck him.”

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MISHNA: One may go out on Shabbat with a locust egg, and with a fox tooth, and with a nail from the crucified, for the purpose of healing; this is the statement of Rabbi Meir. The Rabbis prohibit using these remedies even during the week, due to the prohibition of following the ways of the Amorite. These are superstitious beliefs and the customs of gentiles from which one must distance oneself.

GEMARA: We learned in the mishna that in Rabbi Meir’s opinion one may go out on Shabbat with a locust egg, and a fox tooth, and with a nail from the crucified as a talisman or a cure. The Gemara explains the nature of each: One may go out with a locust egg, as they use it as a talisman to cure an earache; and with a fox tooth, as they use it as a talisman for sleep; the tooth of a live fox for one who sleeps too much to wake him up, and the tooth of a dead fox for one who does not sleep. And one may go out with a nail from the crucified, as they use it as a talisman for curing infection.

We learned in the mishna that going out with those objects is permitted on Shabbat **for the purpose of healing; this is the statement of Rabbi Meir.**

With regard to the *halakha* in the mishna, the Gemara cites **Abaye and Rava, who both said: Anything that contains an element of healing** and seems to be effective **does not contain** an element **of the** prohibition against following the **ways of the Amorite.** There is no cause for suspicion of one who engages in their practice, gentile or Jew.

...

The *tanna* recited the chapter ... discussing the actions of the Amorites before Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Avin. Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Avin said to him: All those enumerated there contain an element of the prohibition against following the ways of the Amorite, except for these: One who has a bone in his throat brings a bone from the same species as the bone that is stuck in his throat, and places it on his skull, and says as follows: “One by one descend and

be swallowed, swallow and descend one by one.” That does not contain an element of the prohibition against following the ways of the Amorite.

For a fish bone stuck in the throat, let him say as follows: “You are stuck like a needle, locked as a shutter, go down, go down.”

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After some discussion of the ways of the Amorite, the Gemara cites additional statements ... on this topic. **One who says: My fortune be fortunate [*gad gaddi*] and be not weary by day or by night;** that statement **contains an element of the ways of the Amorite. Rabbi Yehuda says:** That is more severe than the ways of the Amorite, as *gad is nothing other than a term of idolatry, as it is stated: “And you that forsake the Lord, that forget My holy mountain, that prepare a table for Gad, and that offer mingled wine in full measure unto Meni”* (Isaiah 65:11). *Gad gaddi* is a form of prayer to an idol.

One who requests that **he be called by his wife’s name and she be called by his name** for good fortune, his request **contains an element of the ways of the Amorite.**

One who says: **Let my barrels be strengthened [*donu danei*],** that **contains an element of the ways of the Amorite. Rabbi Yehuda says:** That is more severe than the ways of the Amorite, as *Dan is nothing other than a term of idol worship, as it is stated: “They that swear by the sin of Samaria and say: As your god Dan lives”* (Amos 8:14).

One who hears a raven calling and is concerned about a bad omen and **says to the raven: “Scream,” and says to the female raven: “Whistle and turn your tail to me for the best;”** those statements **contain an element of the ways of the Amorite.**

One who says: “Slaughter this rooster that calls out in the evening” and says: “Slaughter this chicken that calls out like a male rooster”; those statements **contain an element of the ways of the Amorite.**

One who says: **“I will drink and leave over, I will drink and leave over,”** so that his wine will increase; that statement **contains an element of the ways of the Amorite.**

One who cracks eggs on a wall and smears them in front of the chicks; that series of actions contains an element of the ways of the Amorite.

And one who stirs the pot in front of chicks as an auspicious practice so they do not die; that action contains an element of the ways of the Amorite.

A woman who dances and counts the chicks until she reaches the number of seventy-one chicks, so they won't die; her action contains an element of the ways of the Amorite.

A woman **who dances to** ensure that the *kutah*, a spice made from whey salt and bread, that she is preparing will be successful, **and** a woman **who silences** bystanders **to** ensure that the **lentils** will cook properly, **and** a woman **who screams to** ensure that the **pearl barley** will cook properly; all these **contain an element of the ways of the Amorite.**

A woman who urinates in front of her pot so it will cook quickly; that action contains an element of the ways of the Amorite.

But one may put a chip of mulberry wood and shards of glass in the pot so it will cook quickly, as doing so is effective and not merely superstition. **But the Rabbis prohibit shards of glass** not due to superstition; rather, **due to the danger** involved if the glass is not strained out completely.

The Sages taught: One may place a lump of salt into a candle so it will burn brightly; that is effective and not merely for good fortune, so there is no element of the ways of the Amorites involved. **And** similarly, **one may put mud or clay under a candle so it will burn longer.**

...

One who says while drinking: **“Wine and life to the mouth of the Sages,”** this does **not fall into the category of the ways of the Amorite.** There was an **incident with Rabbi Akiva who made a banquet for his son, and over each and every cup he brought he said: “Wine and life to the mouth of the Sages, wine and life to the mouth of the Sages and to the mouth of their students.”**