

HALOCHOSCOPE

May one receive or give a massage, with or without oil, on Shabbos?

The issues:

- (A) *Refuah*, medicating on Shabbos
- (B) *Derech Beri'im*, Something with medicinal qualities, taken by healthy people
- (C) *Shifshuf* and *Mishmush*, massaging on Shabbos
- (D) *Seecha*, rubbing an oil or ointment on skin on Shabbos

(A) *Refuah on Shabbos*

On Shabbos, it is Rabbinically forbidden to take medications. In earlier times, medicines were made by *Shechikas Samemanim*, crushing herbs. This is a *Tolda*, sub-category, of the Scriptural *Melacha* of *Tochain*, milling. Being unprepared for a medical situation that arises, one might violate this. As a precaution, all medicines are forbidden. Both the patient and the caregiver are included in the restriction.

This ordinance applies to medicines made by mixing ingredients, whether they are taken internally or externally. Rather than institute a restriction on medications, the Rabbinical prohibition takes the form of an ordinance forbidding all healing. However, there are exceptions. Healing is restricted is as a precaution against inadvertent violation of the Scriptural *melacha*. Therefore, therapy that does not involve medicine, but is for an ailment also treatable with a medicine, is forbidden. An ailment never treated with a potion, but always with physical therapy, may be treated in its normal way. There is no risk of violating *melacha*.

The restriction does not apply to all patients equally. There is a hierarchy of severity of illness, ranging from *Maichush Be'alma*, minor complaints, to *Choleh Sheyaish Bo Sakana*, the dangerously ill. All restrictions (including most Scriptural prohibitions) are suspended when treating a dangerously ill person. For minor complaints all restrictions apply. A patient so sick that he needs to lie down, or in pain all over his body, is considered *Choleh She'ain Bo Sakanah*, non-dangerously ill. Many restrictions are lifted for him. No *melacha* may be violated. Rabbinical prohibitions are kept as much as possible; violations can be limited by having a gentile do them or by doing them in unusual fashion. This reduces their severity.

Many internal ailments are considered *Yaish Bo Sakanah*. The Talmud defines internal as from the teeth and inwards. Some external wounds are also included in this class. The risk of infection or festering, such as when a non-sterile iron implement caused the wound, is sufficient to allow *Refuah*. In many cases it is considered *Yaish Bo Sakana*. Accordingly, one on a course of antibiotics, even for an external infection, should continue with them on Shabbos. The infection strengthens itself in resistance to the medicine. Interrupting the course will make it harder, if not impossible for the medicine to eventually counteract the in-

fection. If a medical expert determines that the risk is sufficient, one may begin a course on Shabbos. [See Shabbos 108b-109b, Tur, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 328: esp. 5 6 7 40-44, Mishneh Berurah 8. 329.]

(B) *Derech Beri'im*

A major exception to the restrictions against *Refuah* is *Derech Beri'im*, something that is not usually considered healing. This includes three categories. Firstly, there are foods, drinks, lotions, oils and sprays used by healthy people, that can also be used to treat an ailment. For example, prune juice could be a normal beverage or drunk to relieve symptoms of constipation. Since a healthy person using it is not healing himself, it may also be taken as a *Refua*. [However, a laxative potion may not be taken even when it is not intended for its laxative, *Refua* use. Since it will lead to discomfort, this violates the *mitzvah* of *Oneg Shabbos*.]

The limitation on this is that it may not appear obvious that the person is taking it as a treatment. On a skin condition one may use oils that are also used by healthy people. [A specifically medical mixture may not be used for this. By definition, it is being used to heal. However, if a foot spray claims to be helpful for some conditions but is used by many people as a regular spray, it may be used even by those with the condition, provided it is not obvious.] In circles where this oil is not used by healthy people, it is forbidden. The person smearing it on an obvious wound on his skin is evidently using it as a medication. A rash where the skin is not broken is not considered an ailment by some Poskim. Accordingly, a person may spread oil on this, just as a healthy person would. However, if the skin is broken, it is forbidden. One may, however, pour it onto a healthy area of his skin and let it run onto the sore area by itself. At the point of application there is no obvious sign of healing.

Secondly, certain uncomfortable conditions are not considered ailments. Taking care of them is a matter of general health. Examples of these include chewing *Matziti*, a tree gum used to dispel bad breath. The same item can be used as a tooth medicine. Dispelling bad breath is not considered healing. Tooth healing is forbidden. Other examples include preparations to improve the voice, remedies that supposedly dispel drunkenness, and in former times, inhaling tobacco smoke. [Smoking is forbidden Scripturally. However, if the tobacco was burned and the smoke collected before Shabbos, it may be inhaled on Shabbos. Smoking was once considered healthy, and a question was raised about inhaling it for health reasons. Since the condition requiring its inhalation was normal, it was not considered *Refua*.]

Thirdly, some preparations involve *Shechikas Samemanim*, but are not taken as a *Refua*, but as a nutritional supplement by healthy people. This is not food or drink, but it is also not for a condition considered to be an ailment. Nonetheless, it involves the reason for the initial institution, despite the fact that if taken regularly, one anticipated its use and prepared it ahead. The supplement is often taken to strengthen one's constitution, which is considered *Refua* by some Poskim. However, if one is normal, adding the extra measure of strength is not considered healing. A weak person who is not sick but whose constitution needs the boost is 'healing' his 'condition' with this supplement. [In some circles supplements are taken as a substitute for foods that provide such nutrition.] Furthermore, according to some Poskim, the initial institution preventing possible *Shechikas Samemanim* was never made for healthy people. Accordingly, some Poskim consider it *Maachal Beri'im*, regular food, and permit 'eating' them when not obviously treating a condition. [Similarly, a prepared aqueous lotion, even claiming to be medicated, such as moisturizing lotion, may be used by healthy people.] Other Poskim forbid them.

Another factor to consider is the healing properties of the remedy. The Talmud is Halachically considered a medical expert. One must always take into account the conditions considered serious by the Talmud as well as by a medical professional. For example, when a doctor says a condition is not dangerous, contradicting the view of the Talmud, one follows the Talmud. The Talmud permits using most kinds of leaves to apply to a sore eye. It might be widely believed that they heal, but the Talmud says they do not really work. They might even do harm. Since it does not really help, it is not forbidden as a *Refua*. Accordingly, folk-remedies that are not substantiated by the Talmud or a doctor are not forbidden on Shabbos. [Undoubtedly, some 'alternative' experts would be recognized by the Talmud's standards, but not everyone can claim expertise.] Many 'natural' remedies commercialized today fall into this category. Some even have fine print disclaimers contradicting their bold-type claims. These may be used on Shabbos.

Medicine redresses an imbalance in the body. Thus, it would be unhealthy for the healthy person to eat, drink, rub, spray or take any of these in any form. Thus, if healthy people use a product, one may presume it to be *Derech Beri'im*, even if it is also used to treat an ailment. However, if it is expensive, and only 'princes' use it regularly, it is evident that the patient is using it for special reasons, i.e., healing. [See Brachos 38a Shabbos 108b-111b, Poskim. Tur, Sh. Ar., O.C. 327:1, Rema. 328:22 24 29 36-38 41 44, Magen Avraham 43, Biur Halacha (beginning Aval), Be'er Heitev 30, Mishneh Berurah 127, 140. Igros Moshe I:30, III:54, Shmiras Shabbos Kehilchasah 21:8 11, 24:1 5-6, notes.]

(C) *Massaging on Shabbos*

On Shabbos, one may rub oil over the stomach, or even the whole body, for the good feeling. This appears to be done as a soothing rub. It is not intended as a deep, or even moderate massage. However, one may not do it with force. Some say that this alone is forbidden. The massage, in and of itself, might not be considered *Refua*, but rather *Uvda Dechol*, a weekday-like activity that is not in the spirit of Shabbos. Others forbid it only when done in order to perspire. Perspiring activity is often done for *Refua* and can be done using potions. Therefore, even massage without a potion would be forbidden. According to this view, strong massage with no perspiration is permitted on Shabbos.

If one has a hernia or rupture, a warmed cup, garment or brick may be placed on it. This would help it go back into place. The Poskim do not discuss massaging the spot, but it would appear that just as the usual manner of healing is permitted, presumably, because there is no potion treatment alternative, massaging should be permitted as well.

Massaging the abdomen to relieve the bowels is forbidden. This type of healing does have a potion alternative in the form of laxatives. Regular stimulation of the bowels through massage would be *Derech Beri'im*. Light massage done for pleasure is permitted. Even strong massage is permitted according to one view. Thus, the Talmud allows rubbing oil on the abdomen. However, to avoid *Uvda Dechol* one should rub the oil and do the massage at the same time, rather than first rub the oil and then massage.

Massage is sometimes done to relieve tiredness, such as in the legs. This is debated by the Poskim. Some question whether it could be considered similar to *Refua* and forbidden, or not. Others, however, point out that since even healthy people may not do *Refua* type activities done to strengthen one's constitution, this should be forbidden.

The usual *Refua* for a dislocated joint was massage in cold water. Since the injury is not considered severe enough, one may not massage it. One may put it in cold water and let it work itself out. [If a medical expert thinks that if it is not relocated immediately the limb

might be lost, one may actually relocate it.] [See Shabbos 40b, 147a-b, Rashi, Poskim. Rambam, Shabbos 21:21-29. Tur, Sh. Ar. O.C. 327; esp. 2, 328:30 40 42 43, commentaries.]

The types of massage practiced nowadays by professionals is done for healthy people as well as for the ill. Usually, the massage is part of a holistic approach to an ailment, or the patient has stress and needs to relax. A professional is trained to massage in a distinct *Refua* way. This might be to guide the blood-flow to or from the heart, or to relax certain tensions, or to press certain pressure spots. [Presumably, on Shabbos one will not be going to a professional. However, one might have someone at home who can do the same thing.] All of this can be done to healthy people. If it is done firmly, we have already discussed the issue of *Uvda Dechol* according to one view. If it is done gently, the issue of *Derech Beri'im* arises. This particular issue really depends on the circle in which one lives. If ordinary people are unwilling to spend the money on the massage, it is evident that one means it as a *Refua*. However, in a society where ordinary people do massage for enjoyment and relaxation, even where there is no stress and tension, it could be considered *Derech Beri'im*.

(D) Seecha

Massage is done with the help of olive oil or almond oil or a cream. This is not necessarily therapeutic, but to prevent making the skin sore. On Shabbos, applying thick lotion, cream or ointment is generally forbidden. Firstly, this could involve *Memarai'ach*, smoothing a thick substance. This is a Scriptural *tolda* of *Memachaik*, the *melacha* of smoothing the surface of an animal hide. However, the Poskim omit this factor when discussing ointment on the skin. They cite as the main factor *Nolad*, causing a new substance to appear, a Rabbinical prohibition. This happens when the near-solid substance is softened and melts or liquefies. Accordingly, some later Poskim maintain that *Memarai'ach* does not apply on the skin, but on a dressing prepared off the skin. There is an additional issue of *Gozaiz*, the *melacha* forbidding shearing sheep. One may not apply a formula that will inevitably remove hairs from the skin. [See Shabbos 50a, (73a,) 75b, 141a-b, commentaries, Poskim. Halochoscope Vol. IV:1:C, references.]

In conclusion, one may do gentle pleasurable massage on Shabbos using oil.

On the Parsha...

When Eliezer arrived at the house of Besual, Lavan told him that he had cleared the house. Rashi says this means that he had removed the idols. Then he entered the house, untied the camels and placed food for them, and placed water for Eliezer and his men to wash their feet. In last week's Parsha, we are taught that Arabs worship the dust of their feet, and Avraham wanted them to wash it off. Here it is unlikely that after specially clearing out the idols in honor of Eliezer, Lavan suspects him of worshipping the dust of his feet. [However, see Chizkuni.] Furthermore, since the 'Arabs' in last week's Parsha were traveling on foot, they would need to wash off the dust. Eliezer and his men traveled by camel. Why did they wash their feet before settling down to eat?

The answer can be found in a comment of *Hakesav Vehakabalah* on the *Passuk* in last week's Parsha. He asks why Avraham offered them only 'a little water'. His answer is that the water was not to wash their feet thoroughly, but to restore their strength. Therefore, he did not want to delay their eating with a lengthy washing. People coming from a trip, even by camel, are tired. By washing the feet with water, one restores his strength.

Further discussion ... Would it be forbidden for a tired person to wash his feet on Shabbos for this purpose? Is it a case of Lechazaik Mizgo, strengthening his constitution?

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