Laws of Shabbat - Class #27

Three melachot that involve cases of cosmetics, food coloring, and spills.

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Combing - Menapetz

We now continue with processing the wool we’ve just cleaned. Our next job is to arrange it so that the fibers become smoother and straighter. This activity is known as Menapetz,¹ and may be done by beating the wool, picking through it, or combing it. Since this last method is the most effective and common, we use it to define this melacha.

There are only a few applications of Menapetz.

**Combing a wig** – A sheitel is the traditional name for the wig that many observant women use to cover their own hair. They may be made of human hair, synthetic hair, or a combination. Combing the sheitel so that the hairs are in place is considered an act of Menapetz according to some opinions.² To avoid this issue, a woman may use a soft-bristle brush or wide-toothed comb that will improve the sheitel’s appearance, but will not closely align the fibers.³

**Untangling tzitzit** – Let’s move over to the men’s side now. Tzitzit, the fringes that many observant men wear, are made of tightly tied wool, and attached to a light garment that is worn underneath a man’s shirt. If the tzitzit fringes become tangled, a person is not allowed to disentangle them on Shabbat, since this closely resembles combing out wool.⁴

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¹ Pronounced meh-nah-PAITS.
² They reason that, since Menapetz involves “creating usable fibers from... tangled fibers” (*Principles of Hilchos Shabbos*, ‘Menapetz’), this action is no different. Orach Chaim 337:2; 39 Melochos, p. 735.
³ *Shemirat Shabbat K’Hilchato* 14:46; 39 Melochos, p. 735.
⁴ *Principles of Hilchos Shabbos*, ‘Menapetz’.
Coloring - Tzovaya

In the Mishkan, three specific colors of wool – scarlet, blue and purple – were required, so it was necessary to dye the wool once it had been cleaned and combed.

This melacha, called Tzovaya, is actually very relevant today. Tzovaya may be defined as “creating a more suitable object by changing or strengthening its color.” This melacha is a good illustration of a basic principle underlying the laws of Shabbat: ‘creative labor’ is forbidden, regardless of the amount of effort it takes.

Now, in order to be considered Tzovaya under Torah law, the action has to result in a “lasting” form of coloring. That is, the coloring needs to remain in place for at least a short period of time. This is because the classic case of Tzovaya is dyeing fabric, which is actually a permanent form of coloring. However, even coloring that lasts only briefly is considered to be Tzovaya under rabbinic law.

In practice, then, there are only a few examples of coloring that is so temporary that it is permitted on Shabbat. One of these is photo-gray lenses (the kind that darken automatically in sunlight and then fade to normal indoors).

What Actions Involve Coloring?

What comes to mind when we think of “coloring”? There are some obvious examples, such as painting your house (or anything else) and drawing a picture. (And these activities are, indeed, not allowed on Shabbat.)

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6 Pronounced tsoh-VAY-ah.
8 Rambam (Shabbat 9:13)
9 Shu’t Igros Moshe (Orach Chaim 3:45); Shemirat Shabbat K’Hilchato 18:70; 39 Melochos, p. 748. There is room to suggest that there is no coloring of the lens at all, but is rather like pulling down a shade. Also, nothing is done by the person to effect the color change.
10 Drawing a picture is also a problem of Kotaiv (writing), a melacha we’ll learn about soon.
Cosmetics

An important, and common, application of Tzovaya is putting on cosmetics. Almost all types of makeup – including blush, lipstick, eye shadow, nail polish, and so on – are intended to add color to a person’s body. As a general rule, then, putting on makeup during Shabbat is not allowed.¹¹

This halacha probably comes as a surprise to many readers. Indeed, many observant women do not use makeup on Shabbat. Nevertheless, a couple of qualifications are in order:

- Makeup can be put on prior to Shabbat and left on until Shabbat ends.
- The melacha of Tzovaya only applies when the coloring is actually attached to the material being colored. Because of this, some opinions do permit the use of makeup that does not ‘attach’ – i.e. it is (a) non-oil-based and (b) in the form of powder.¹²

In fact, there are cosmetic products on the market that are advertised as acceptable for use on Shabbat. If this sounds tentative, it is – this is a complex area of halacha, and each product should be researched before being used.¹³

Finally, it is permitted on Shabbat to ‘remove color’ – e.g. by washing makeup off one’s face.¹⁴

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¹¹ Using makeup is also a problem of Memaraich (smoothing), a melacha we’ll learn about soon.
¹³ For those who want to read further, there is a thorough and clearly-written set of three articles about the use of makeup on Shabbat by Rabbi Chaim Jachter. They are available at www.kol Torah.org/rabbij.
¹⁴ Shemirat Shabbat K’Hilchato 14:79
**Food**

Perhaps the most common kind of “coloring” we do takes place in the kitchen. Whenever we combine foods, the colors mix with each other. This would seem to be a major issue, but actually there is a principle in halacha of *Ain Tzovaya B’ochlin* – “there is no (prohibition of) coloring regarding foods.” Why? Because food is meant to be consumed, and so is different from dyed wool or other items that we color and keep for ongoing use.¹⁵

What this principle means is: If you add an ingredient to food to make it taste better, the fact that the food’s color will change is not a problem.¹⁶ Similarly, if you have two foods next to each other on your plate – a good example would be turkey and cranberry sauce – the fact that the color of one will rub off on the other is also fine.

This principle does not include coloring food merely for decoration. So adding food coloring which adds no taste and only makes the food look better is an act of Tzovaya and is therefore not allowed.¹⁷

**Wiping Spills**

Finally, there is the issue of coloring that actually makes something look worse. The classic example is wiping up a dark spill (e.g., wine) with a clean white cloth. To be sure, the cloth gets colored, but not in

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¹⁵ Orach Chaim 320:19; 39 Melochos, p. 750-51.
¹⁶ Some authorities prefer that you add the ‘coloring’ ingredient first, and then add the item that will be colored. For example, if you’re making chocolate milk by adding syrup to the milk, put the syrup in first and then add the milk. In this way, the coloring is accomplished less directly. Sha’ar HaTziyun 318:65; 39 Melochos, p. 751.
¹⁷ Mishnah Berurah 320:56
a way that a person wants. As a result, many authorities say that this kind of coloring is permitted on Shabbat.\(^\text{18}\)

Other authorities don’t like this exception. They recommend that we should wipe colored stains with a cloth that is (1) not white and (2) not the same color as the stain.\(^\text{19}\)

Disposable cloths (such as napkins and paper towels) can be used according to everyone. There’s no issue of improving their appearance since they are thrown out right away.\(^\text{20}\)

(It is important to take care in handling a paper towel that is fully saturated, as moving it will inevitably cause liquid to be squeezed out, which is a prohibition of sechitah – see Lesson #9.)\(^\text{21}\)

**Spinning - Toveh**

Once the wool was dyed in the Tabernacle, it needed to be spun into a form that could be used to create fabric. Such spinning is known as Toveh,\(^\text{22}\) and was accomplished by twisting the individual strands of wool into a stronger, “continuous thread.”\(^\text{23}\)

The idea behind Toveh has little application outside of spinning thread or some other fiber (for example, twisting cotton to form a wick).\(^\text{24}\) These would be prohibited whether the spinning is done by hand or using a spinning wheel.

\(^\text{18}\) Mishnah Berurah 320:59; 39 Melochos, p. 753-54.
\(^\text{19}\) *Principles of Hilchos Shabbos*, ‘Tzoveyah’. White is not recommended because any color will show up on it, and using the same color as the stain is not recommended because the stain acts to deepen the color of the fabric.
\(^\text{21}\) As discussed there, some opinions are lenient regarding paper towels.
\(^\text{22}\) Pronounced toe-VEH.
\(^\text{23}\) Mishnah Berurah, appendix to Orach Chaim 344; 39 Melochos, p. 757.
\(^\text{24}\) Sha’ar HaTziyun 514:52; 39 Melochos, p. 758.