

COSMETICS ON SHABBOS

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

QUESTION: Are there any cosmetics that a woman is permitted to use on Shabbos?

DISCUSSION: There are two forbidden Shabbos Labors which might be transgressed when using makeup; one is Memareiach, smoothing, and the other is Tzoveia, coloring.⁽¹⁾

All poskim, without exception or debate, agree to the following: Any cream makeup, liquid makeup, lipstick,⁽²⁾ or makeup of any sort which contains cream or oil is strictly prohibited to use. These forms of makeup may not be applied even on top of existing makeup to touch up. etc.

However, when it comes to face powder or powdery substances which have no cream or oil base - such as certain brands of blush and eye shadow - there is some ambiguity among contemporary halachic authorities. The basis for the confusion is a responsum written by Harav M. Feinstein in 1957,⁽³⁾ in which he writes that "to throw (sprinkle) across the face white powder which does not last at all is not a violation of the prohibition of coloring." Some interpreted his words to mean that all powders which do not contain cream or oil may be used since they do not cling to the skin for long.⁽⁴⁾ But it remains highly doubtful whether that is what Harav Feinstein meant. In a subsequent responsum, written in 1984,⁽⁵⁾ he clarifies that in his original responsum he was referring to "simple white powder called talc which is made without oil and does not last."⁽⁶⁾ He also writes that "most of the powders which are sold as makeup are oil-based, and that some of them last temporarily, and therefore using most of them is a question of Coloring." It is stretching things, therefore, to attribute to Harav Feinstein a blanket heter (dispensation) to use any powdery makeup on Shabbos.

While Harav Feinstein's view remains somewhat unclear,⁽⁷⁾ Harav S.Z. Auerbach⁽⁸⁾ leaves no room as to his opinion on this question. He writes that "so long as the purpose is to color [the skin], even if it lasts only a short while, there is no basis to be lenient. This is especially true when the powder was intended for makeup and women color their faces in this manner, we find no source to be lenient."

There are yet other poskim who prohibit using any tinted powder but permit using white powder.⁽⁹⁾

Based on all of the above, the practical halachah is as follows: As a rule, women should not apply

any makeup on Shabbos. But since not wearing makeup is a personal issue which could, under certain circumstances, affect relationships, etc.,⁽¹⁰⁾ it is recommended that those who find themselves in such a situation consult a rabbi for guidance.

FOOTNOTES:

- 1** In this case, where the coloring is being done to a person's skin, the prohibition is Rabbinic in nature; Mishnah Berurah 303:79. See Shulchan Shelomo 303:16, that using nail polish may be Biblically forbidden.
- 2** Colored or colorless.
- 3** Igros Moshe O.C. 1:114.
- 4** See Yechaveh Da'as 4:28, who infers from this responsum that all non- oil-based makeup is temporary and does not last. See also Ketzos ha-Shulchan 146:20, who writes that as long as the color does not become "attached" to the face it is not considered Coloring. But even according to this lenient interpretation, it remains unclear whether the makeup powders available today, which adhere to the skin for a long time when applied normally, are permitted.
- 5** Igros Moshe O.C. 5:27.
- 6** Even when powder is permitted to be used, it must be in powder form before the onset of Shabbos; *ibid*.
- 7** In addition to the written responsa, there are several unsubstantiated and unclearly understood oral rulings reported by individuals who discussed this matter with Harav Feinstein.
- 8** Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 14:59 and Tikunim U'miluim. See also Teshuvos Beis Yisrael 56, who prohibits all powdered makeup.
- 9** Maharam Brisk 1:23; Be'er Moshe 8:25; Shevet ha-Levi 1:97;6:33.
- 10** See Teshuvos Ra'avan 354. See also O.C. 613:10.

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