

BODY CARE ON SHABBOS

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Question: Is it permitted to use baby wipes for cleaning a baby on Shabbos or Yom Tov? ¹

Discussion: When using baby wipes on Shabbos [or Yom Tov], we are concerned with violating the Shabbos Labor of Sechitah, Squeezing. ² If the wipe can be used without Squeezing then it may be used on Shabbos. A baby wipe that is slightly moist and is gently dabbed onto the diaper area would be an example of the permissible use of a baby wipe on Shabbos.

However, a baby wipe that is very moist — and there are numerous types of wipes on the market ranging from very moist to hardly so — would be prohibited from use on Shabbos, ³ and indeed, may even be muktzeh, since the slightest pressure applied upon it would cause Sechitah. ⁴ Moreover, pressing any type of baby wipe — even one which is only slightly or moderately moist — against the baby's skin, and/or scrubbing the diaper area with it may also be forbidden, as such pressure would result in Sechitah.

In actual practice, cleaning a baby who is wet or lightly soiled can generally be accomplished by gently dabbing a wipe on his skin. Indeed, one does not want to "squeeze" out any more moisture than necessary so as to eliminate the need to dry off the diaper area before putting on the diaper. When cleaning a baby who is more heavily soiled, however, one normally has to apply pressure to the wipe in order to clean the baby off. This becomes a case of Squeezing and may be forbidden on Shabbos and Yom Tov.

Question: On Shabbos or Yom Tov, is it permitted to use a cotton swab (Q-tip) to dab hydrogen peroxide, etc., on a cut or an abrasion?

Discussion: Based on the previous Discussion, there is no reason to prohibit using cotton swabs on Shabbos. Although it is forbidden to soak a cotton ball (or a piece of cotton batting) and then squeeze the liquid out of it, ⁵ this does not apply to using a swab. The small piece of pressed cotton at the swab's end is not meant to absorb, nor is the liquid "squeezed" out of it. When used normally, the tip merely transfers the liquid to the cut without any squeezing taking place. It is permitted to be used. ⁶ Obviously, though, in the atypical case where the swab is used in a manner which would result in squeezing, it would be forbidden to use it on Shabbos.

Question: On Shabbos or Yom Tov, is it permitted to flush a toilet which contains a disinfectant tablet

that colors the water?

Discussion: There are a number of different types of toilet disinfectants and deodorizers on the market which color the water blue when the toilet is flushed. L'chatchilah, none of them may be used on Shabbos or Yom Tov, as flushing a toilet and thereby coloring the water in the toilet bowl may be prohibited min ha-Torah as a violation of the Shabbos Labor of Coloring. The blue color gives the water in the bowl a more "hygienic" look, so the coloring of the water is beneficial and hence forbidden on Shabbos.⁷ It is important, therefore, that the disinfectant unit be removed from the tank or bowl before the onset of Shabbos or Yom Tov.

Question: What should one do if he forgot to remove the disinfectant tablet or if he is a guest in a home where such a device is in the toilet?

Discussion: It depends on the type of tablet that has been inserted in the toilet:

If the disinfectant unit is inserted near the top of the rim of the tank, then he may flush the toilet. This is permitted because the direct act of flushing will not color the water since the water will not turn blue until it has risen to the top of the tank; the Coloring is merely an indirect result of the flushing, a *gerama*, which is permitted under these circumstances.⁸

However, if the disinfectant unit is in the bottom of the tank or is suspended from the rim of the bowl, then the toilet may not be flushed. Flushing such a toilet will directly color the new water coming in and *gerama* will not apply. One should make every effort to remove the disinfectant tablet from inside the tank or the bowl, preferably through "indirect movement." If this is impossible or impractical, and one will be embarrassed to leave the toilet unflushed (*kevod ha-beriyos*), he may rely on the view of some poskim who argue⁹ that flushing such a toilet is not a violation of Coloring,¹⁰ and he should flush the toilet in an unusual way, e.g., by using his elbow or foot.

Question: Is it permitted to brush one's teeth on Shabbos, with or without toothpaste?

Discussion: The consensus of contemporary poskim is that it is forbidden to use toothpaste on Shabbos.¹¹ Their main concern is that applying toothpaste to the teeth or the brush could result in a transgression of the prohibited Shabbos Labor of *Memareiach*, smoothing. Liquid toothpaste, however, is permitted.

Brushing without toothpaste is permitted,¹² provided that the following conditions are met:

- Use a toothbrush that is designated for Shabbos use only.¹³ Some poskim require that the Shabbos toothbrush also look different from the weekday one, e.g., be of a different color or style.¹⁴
- Use a soft brush so as not to irritate the gums and cause bleeding. [People with extremely sensitive gums who bleed whenever they brush their teeth may not use a toothbrush at all.]
- To avoid the

prohibition of Sechitah, squeezing, a dry toothbrush should be used. It is, however, permitted to rinse the mouth with cold water first and then use the toothbrush.¹⁵ •The toothbrush should not be rinsed off after it is used unless it is going to be used again on that same Shabbos.¹⁶

Sources:

1. Numerous poskim have grappled with this issue and have rendered various, somewhat contradictory responses to this question. Some poskim, following a more stringent line, have forbidden using baby wipes altogether on Shabbos (see Minchas Yitzchak 10:25), while others tended to be more lenient. For a comprehensive review of the halachic debate, see Shulchan Shelomo 320:22; Children in Halachah, pgs. 205-207; Orchos Shabbos, pgs. 573-576; Ohr ha-Shabbos, vol. 8, pgs. 40-64 and vol. 18, pgs. 20-23.
2. The poskim debate whether or not "squeezing" wipes is a Biblical or a Rabbinic prohibition; see Igros Moshe, O.C. 2:70 and Children in Halachah, pgs. 207-208.
3. It would be permitted, however, to prepare this type of wipes before Shabbos by squeezing out most of the moisture from them.
4. See O.C. 320:16-17.
5. Shemiras Shabbos k'Hilchasah 32:59.
6. Based on a ruling of Harav A. Weiss, published in Ohr ha-Shabbos, vol. 18, pgs. 22-23, disputing the ruling of Orchos Shabbos 13:45 who does not permit using cotton swabs on Shabbos.
7. Shulchan Shelomo 320:31-3. See Peninei ha-Maor, vol. 1, pg. 523.
8. For two reasons: 1. Because of kevod ha-beriyos; 2. Because at this point, the person flushing the toilet certainly has no intention of Coloring the water. While it is still inevitable that it will happen (pesik reisha), when gerama is combined with pesik reisha it is permitted according to many poskim; see Eglei Tal, Zorea 21; Har Tzvi, O.C. 188; Halachos of Shabbos, Zorea, pg. 59, quoting Harav M. Feinstein.
9. 1. The main purpose of the tablet is to disinfect the toilet; the color of the water is merely incidental and unintentional; 2. Coloring water is permitted, as Coloring does not apply to foods or beverages.
10. See Tzitz Eliezer 14:47; Be'er Moshe 2:28; Az Nidberu 12:13.
11. Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:112; Seridei Eish 2:28; Minchas Yitzchak 3:48; Tzitz Eliezer 7:30; Shevet ha-Levi 5:45. [While a minority opinion permits using toothpaste—see Ketzos ha-Shulchan (Badei ha-Shulchan 138:31), Gevuros Eliyahu 91, Yabia Omer 4:27-30 and Nefesh ha-Rav, pg. 168—it is almost universally accepted not to do so.]
12. See Minchas Shelomo 2:35:3.
13. Based on Mishnah Berurah 327:10.
14. Minchas Yitzchak 3:48; 3:50.
15. Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:112; Shevet ha-Levi 5:45.

16. Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:112.

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