

# Toothpaste on Shabbat

## תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף קמו עמוד א

**משנה.** ולא יקבנה מצדה, ואם היתה נקובה - לא יתן עליה שעוה, מפני שהוא ממרח.

**MISHNA:** One may not apply wax to it to seal the hole, because in doing so he spreads the wax evenly on the barrel and thereby violates the prohibited labor of smoothing.

**EXPLANATION:** There is a prohibition of smoothing. Either: The prohibition to spread on shabbat could apply to toothpaste, or it could not because toothpaste is not as viscous as wax and may not therefore be considered the prohibited spreading.

## תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף קמו עמוד ב

ואם היתה נקובה וכו'. מישחא; רב אסר, ושמואל שרי... בפירוש אמרת לן משמיה דרב מישחא שרי.

**GEMARA:** There is a dispute over whether or not it is permitted to seal a hole with oil: Rav prohibited doing so, and Shmuel permitted doing so. The Gemara explains: Rav, prohibits oil due to concern that one come to seal a hole with wax. Shmuel holds that it is not prohibited. Rav later said that oil is permitted for use in sealing a hole!

What convinced Rav?

**MELACHA OF SPREADING**

## מגן אברהם אורח חיים סימן שטז

וי"ל דממרח לא שייך אלא כשכונתו שיתמרח דבר ע"ג חבירו אבל הכא רוצה שיבלע בקרקע.

**Magen Avraham:** it's only considered 'spreading' when you want one thing spread upon the other, creating a new layer.

**EXPLANATION:** With toothpaste, you don't want it remaining on the teeth, it's there only to lubricate the brushing and then wash off. Therefore, there would be no problem with the spreading of toothpaste on shabbat.

Rav prohibits spreading, as if you spread once, you may end up spreading wax, which is prohibited.

However, Shmuel permits spreading as he believed that people would never make the jump from permitted to prohibited spreading.

Rav later changes his mind and allows oil for sealing a hole.

# Toothpaste on Shabbat

## Related Stories

### **Story of a Yeshiva boy smoking on Shabbat who was rebuked by the Chafetz Chaim:**

“He took my hand and clasped it tenderly in both of his, bringing it up to his face. His eyes were closed for a moment. When he opened them, they were filled with tears. He then said to me in a hushed voice full of pain and astonishment, 'Shabbat!' And he started to cry whilst repeating with astonishment, 'Shabbat, the holy Shabbat!'

Tears streamed down his face and one of them rolled onto my hand. I thought it would bore a hole right through my skin. When I think of that tear today, I can still feel its heat. I can't describe how awful it felt to know that I had made the great tzaddik weep. His rebuke consisted only of those few words. I felt that he was not angry, but rather sad and fearful. He seemed frightened at the consequences of my actions.”

The invisible scar of this precious tear had become his permanent reminder to observe the "holy Shabbat" for the rest of his life.

## Related questions

- Can you think of any other Melachot brushing teeth violates?
- Why would some people choose to be more stringent and not use regular toothpaste?

## General questions

- Where do Melachot come from and why do we continue to apply their restrictions on Shabbat in the modern day?
- Have mitzvot such as keeping Shabbat become less important to us as a nation? If so why?
- Is sleeping and eating enough to say that you have celebrated shabbat? What constitutes fully immersing yourself in Shabbat?

## Personal questions

- Do you agree with looking for and using halachic loopholes?
- How much do you know about the Melachot of Shabbat? If you knew more would you be inclined to keep them?
- Do you think that choosing to place boundaries on ourselves like we do on Shabbat is freeing?

## Interactive resources

**Youtube: Short story – The importance of Shabbat – Rabbi Wallerstein:**

- What are your thoughts on this video?
- Do you agree that we should go to these lengths in order to keep Shabbat/make sure others keep Shabbat?

**Jews – Pears Foundation – Shabbat (page 7 statistics):**

- Why do so many more Jews keep Kashrut than Shabbat?
- Is it easier to keep Chokim or mitzvot that we are given clear reasons for?
- How would you categorise which mitzvot are most important to you? Is it right to categorise them in this way?
- Should DeRabbanan and D'orayta mitzvot be treated differently in our every day lives?

## Other sources to bring into the discussion

**R Moshe Feinstein:** Using toothpaste on Shabbat violates the Rabbinic prohibition of smoothing the teeth.

- **R Soloveitchik:** Cleaning the teeth of dirt is not a prohibition. Smoothing by removing part of a surface is prohibited. If this were the case with brushing teeth we would have no teeth left!

**Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks:**

- “Shabbat is the greatest tutorial in liberty ever devised”

**Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan:**

- “If we are aware of some rules, we do not understand them at all. Because of this lack of understanding, we often fail to observe these rules completely.”