



לעילוי נשמת
 יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

Cutting Off Threads

Question: On Shabbat, I noticed on my suit a thread that needed to be cut off, which tends to bother me. Was it permitted to cut it on Shabbat?

Answer: The first candidate for prohibition is the *melacha* of *koreiah* (tearing/cutting material). The *mishna* (Shabbat 73a) describes the case as being done to subsequently sew up, but the Rambam (Shabbat 10:10) indicates that it applies whenever the tearing has a positive outcome (see Be'ur Halacha to 340:14).

Because it is flimsy, it is possible that *koreiah* does not apply to the thread itself (see Rav SZ Auerbach, cited in Shemirat Shabbat K'hilchata (=SSK) 35:(48), regarding the fibers that rip when one pulls off a piece of cotton – admittedly, thread is stronger). Also, the thread has no independent significance and will never be used again.

On the other hand, one is severing part of the **garment**, which is thereby improved. Location and context can make a difference. If one cuts off strings at the edges, it may violate the *melacha* of *mechatech* (Be'ur Halacha to 340:13 in the name of the Yerushalmi – a less than authoritative source applies that prohibition

to our case). SSK (15:66) forbids removing a string of warp or woof from a woven fabric as *potzeia* (the opposite of weaving). Orchot Shabbat (11:(26), and citing communication with Rav N. Karelitz) makes a distinction for leniency in our case. The string protruding from a garment is not considered a part of the fabric, and so cutting it, even close to the garment, relates only to the thread. This is different from the leftover stitching from a button that fell or pieces of wool that protrude from the fabric, where they are more significantly interconnected and many forbid removing them (see SSK 15:68; Orchot Shabbat 11:18). The case for leniency is bolstered by the opinion (Be'ur Halacha *ibid.*) that *koreiah* is when both sides of the rip are used afterwards, and **perhaps** it is not even Rabbinic *koreiah* when this is not so (Chut Shani, Shabbat I, p. 142).

Sometimes it is permitted to cut string around a utensil even when the cutting facilitates using the utensil (Shulchan Aruch, OC 314:8). However, that is a special leniency that applies to destroying an impediment that is preventing one to get to food (see Chazon Ish, OC 51:13). One cannot learn from there to cut a string in order to beautify the thing to which it is attached.

Another potential problem is *makeh b'patis* (=mbp), a Torah-level prohibition of doing a final stage of preparing a utensil, or the related Rabbinic prohibition of *tikkun mana*. In other words, a suit with uncut threads from its sewing is a not fully ready-to-wear suit. The *gemara* (Shabbat 48a) forbids on the

Torah-level opening the knots that are made to the collar area of a cloak, and Rashi (ad loc.) explains that this is *mbp*. The Shulchan Aruch (OC 302:2) forbids purposely removing the pills that formed on clothing as *mbp*. The more serious the imperfection, the more likely it is that it might be considered *mbp/tikkun mana*. Since in the garment industry, one of the final things that was classically done before sending the suit to market is “thread trimming,” it is quite plausible that the cutting would be *mbp*, especially regarding a new suit where the thread always stuck out. On the other hand, while *poskim* debate whether and when one may remove a label from a suit (SSK 15:79; Orchot Shabbat 11:13), they do not consider it *mbp*, even though it is something one always does before wearing it. There are differences with this case (see *ibid.* (20)), but applications of *mbp* are among halachic matters that are very difficult to predict.

To be honest, your case has happened to me many times, and I have always thought (I believe like most *shomrei Shabbat*), that it was forbidden to cut the hanging threads. To my

surprise, the only serious discussion I found is in Orchot Shabbat (11:(26)), which is not a lenient *sefer*, and he believes it is permitted to cut them. I have read and heard “passing” opinions of respected *rabbanim* who forbid it. So, I do not plan to be lenient for myself, but I would not rule clearly that it is forbidden. ■

Having a dispute?



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