



Different Standards of Shabbat Clothes Cleanliness

לעילוי נשמת
 יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

Question: On Shabbat, with our kids putting their shoes on my husband’s pants, in an Israeli climate etc., my husband’s clothes often get dusty/dirty to a degree that embarrasses me. The other week, I hit his suit firmly with my hand to remove **most** of a particularly bad patch of dirt. He said that was *assur*; I was taught otherwise. Who is right?

Answer: Each of you has a reasonable claim. We will explore different factors, approaches and gray areas.

Classical *libun* involves using an agent (usually, water) to remove a substance that is embedded in a fabric. Cleaning that lacks either water or absorbed substance is apt to either only violate a Rabbinic prohibition or, often, be permitted.

One of the test cases is found in Shabbat 147a. The *gemara* says that one who shakes

out his garment on Shabbat violates a Torah prohibition. Rashi explains that this refers to shaking out dirt, and Tosafot says that this could not be *libun* (due to lack of water – Ritva) but rather it must be talking about shaking out dew. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 302:1) rules like Tosafot, but the Rama cites Rashi’s position, which includes dirt in the prohibition. Sephardi *poskim* disagree about which opinion to follow (Ohr L’Tzion II:24:1 – stringent; Yalkut Yosef (OC 302:9) – lenient), but the consensus among Ashkenazi *poskim* is that *libun* could apply to shaking off dirt (Mishna Berura 302:6).

However, the *gemara* sets conditions for violating *libun* in this case: the clothes are black and new, and one is *makpid* on their cleanliness. This is because a non-classic cleaning is forbidden only when these factors make the cleaning significant enough. The Be’ur Halacha (to 302:1) posits that there are not fully three separate conditions. Rather, when it is black and new, particularness is assumed until it is clearly missing, whereas without those objective factors, only when one is particularly *makpid* is it forbidden.

Each of the factors needs clarification. *Poskim* say that black includes other dark colors (see Shemirat Shabbat K’hilchata 15:28-29). New also likely includes something that “looks new” (*ibid.*). These qualities are hard to

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quantify, but note that, generally, most people save their best-looking clothing for Shabbat. The degree of *hakpada* is also elusive. Orchot Shabbat (13:25) describes it as whether one will go out with it without cleaning (what level of alternative existing is unclear.) Shemirat Shabbat K'hilchata (ibid.) differs slightly – he would not put it on dirty. Perhaps there is a *machloket* if he would not choose to wear it but he would not remove it once on. He adds that if one is *makpid* only because of Shabbat's honor, that is not called *makpid*.

Another factor relates to the modes of cleaning. Shemirat Shabbat K'hilchata (ibid.) says that even when it is permitted based on the above parameters, that is to bang it softly, not to shake vigorously or hit hard with a hand. In the context of removing a clump of mud (Shulchan Aruch, OC 302:7), the Be'ur Halacha (ibid.) says that it is permitted when a mark of dirt remains. He similarly argues (to 302:1) that the prohibition of shaking off dirt when one is *makpid* is only when it becomes totally clean. Some argue that in the standard case, a mark from dirt/dust will remain and yet it is still forbidden (see Dovev Meisharim I:61;

Halichot Shabbat (Lintzer) VIII:11).

A factor that is difficult to decide is whether the threshold of *hakpada* is different for the clothes' owner and the person who is cleaning (i.e., your case). The Be'ur Halacha (ibid.) leaves it as an unanswered question whether that is considered *makpid*. It is also unclear if your husband is not personally *makpid* but defers to you – does that turn him into *makpid*?

In summary, there are many opinions and factors with gray areas, and so both your claim and your husband's claim each have a reasonable basis. If you do this often, it is even possible that sometimes it is permitted and sometimes not. What your policy should be in the future is a good question that we cannot solve unequivocally. ■

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