

A Physician Who Must Shave His Beard in Order to Protect Himself

כבוד יקירי תלמיד חכם ירא אלוקים ורופא מומחה ד"ר...

CONCERNING YOUR POSITION in a hospital treating coronavirus patients and the view of experts that your beard doesn't allow a protective mask to fit hermetically over the face, thus exposing you to the risk of infection—you describe your distress at shaving your beard that you have grown since your youth.

Truthfully, this is only a matter of *chassidus*. According to halachah, there is no prohibition in shaving one's beard as long as one does not use a razor. The *Chasam Sofer* attests that there were many great people who shaved their beards, including the *Rama miPano* (one of the foremost Kabbalists),¹ and doing so isn't the slightest sin. *Rashi* in *Krissus* cites one explanation that Aharon HaKohen would shave his beard, and that two drops of the anointing oil spread to the roots of his hair.²

True, according to the *Zohar Hakadosh*,³ a "*dikna kadi-sha*" (holy beard) is enormously significant, and the *Ari haKadosh* cautions against uprooting even one hair from one's beard "for the hairs of the beard are the conduits of bounty from above."⁴ Nevertheless, this is a matter of Kabbalah, not of halachah.

The *Chida* writes:⁵

Fortunate is he who allows his beard to grow, as is the custom in the cities of Turkey, etc. But he who dwells in the cities of Edom and is a businessman and needs to shave his beard should be most careful to only do so with scissors or with cream and not, G-d forbid, with a razor.

The *Sheyarei Berachah* writes similarly:⁶

In the cities of Edom, many G-d-fearing people place a cream, a thin solution, on their beards, and all the hair falls out. Doing so is absolutely permitted, as ruled in Shu"t Shemesh Tzedakah [ibid.], unlike the authority who forbade it. I, also, in the paucity of my knowledge, wrote as such at length in that same teshuvah, with the help of Heaven. I also explained that it is better to use the aforementioned cream than scissors that resemble a razor.

This is all according to halachah. However, according to Kabbalah it is forbidden to shave one's beard at all. The Acharonim already bring as such from the Ari, zt"l.

I know that the *Shu"t Tzemach Tzedek* holds that it is forbidden by Torah law to trim one's beard using scissors

1 *Shu"t* O.C. 159.

2 *Krissus* 5b, s.v. *mi'sefer*.

3 *Zohar Hakadosh* 3, 130b.

4 *Ta'amei haMitzvos*, *Kedoshim*, *Mitzvas Ha'zakan*.

5 See the *sefer Moreh b'Etzba*, 135.

6 *Y.D.* 181:7–10.

that resemble a razor,⁷ but his position contradicts the simple understanding of the Gemara—and all of the *poskim*.

Since you deal with cases of *pikuach nefesh*, and your position in the department cannot be fulfilled by others,

this is your mitzvah, your obligation, and your merit. Just as you received reward for maintaining a beard until this point, so will you receive a reward for refraining from doing so now.

שים שלום טובה וברכה חיים חן וחסד ורחמים עלינו ועל כל ישראל עמך.

7 Shu"t Tzemach Tzedek, Y.D. 93.

These essays were written during various stages of the coronavirus pandemic. Facts and knowledge about this virus change daily. Torah is forever.