



B'NAI DAVID-JUDEA

Shabbat Shorts

For our next two Shabbat Shorts, we will answer questions that our Shabbat Short readers asked in response to our learning about boneh (building) the week before last.

When we learned about boneh, we discussed the practical cases of using a Pack and Play, strollers, and folding chairs and tables. And we also discussed braiding hair on Shabbat.

In response to the case of the folding objects, multiple Shabbat Short readers asked a great question: If a Pack and Play, strollers, and folding chairs and tables are not considered boneh, why do most people not use umbrellas on Shabbat?

We noted that the permissibility of the above folding objects comes from the facts that they were not only designed to be folded and unfolded like the rabbinic example of the kisei teraskal (folding chair), but they also do not include any assembly or construction at all in their usage. Doesn't this also sound like how umbrellas work?!

You'd think so. But under boneh, the rabbis prohibited making an ohel arai (a temporary canopy) that protects the area beneath it. What does this mean? A halachic ohel is any overhead covering that is one tefach by one tefach (4 inches by 4 inches). Certain temporary canopies are permitted, as long as their purpose is not to protect the area beneath them (a folding table for example does create a canopy, but its primary purpose is to provide a surface to eat on). An umbrella (or parasol, פֶּאָרֶאָסֶל), however, explicitly protects the area beneath it, thereby distinguishing it from the other objects we have discussed. (Mishnah Berurah Orach Chayim 315:20).

There is a famous dispute about umbrellas, though, that reflects the complexity of their categorization. The Noda B'Yehuda (18th century Prague) first ruled that umbrellas could be considered biblically prohibited (based on the Rif). He did discuss the possibility of opening an umbrella before Shabbat for use on Shabbat, but because of maarit ayin (that it may appear a person actually opened the umbrella on Shabbat itself), he discouraged that approach.

But the Chatam Sofer (19th century Bratislava) ruled that an ohel arai is only ever

rabbinically prohibited, and since an umbrella is by nature moveable (not a buildable structure like the Mishkan), it is not even considered an ohel rabbinically! The Chatam Sofer therefore concluded that he did not recommend using an umbrella on Shabbat, but that it is not prohibited.

Finally, the Chazon Ish (20th century Bnei Brak) ruled that an umbrella is prohibited both because it is considered tikkun maneh (completing an object) and because the rabbis made a takana (a ruling throughout generations) that they cannot be used.

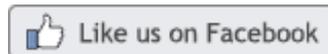
Long story short, the fact that there are differing opinions reveals how complex the question of umbrellas is. And the majority of opinions rule that a umbrella is distinct from the other folding objects we have mentioned because of its purpose. Halacha lemaaseh: The practice in our community is not to use umbrellas on Shabbat.

Stay tuned for next time on Shabbat Shorts when we will answer another question from our Shabbat Short readers!

I love feedback!
rabbanitalissa@bnaidavid.com

B'nai David-Judea 8906 West Pico Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90035
director@bnaidavid.com

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