



B'NAI DAVID-JUDEA

Shabbat Shorts

A Shabbat Short reader asked a great question:
My daughters asked if they can braid their hair on Shabbat. Is this permitted?

The answer is more complicated than we might expect. Braiding hair, קליעת שער, is considered a rabbinic prohibition because it falls under the melacha of boneh (building). What? How can braiding hair be building-- it's certainly not a roof over one's head!

The truth is, braiding a braid on Shabbat is not assur mideoraita (biblically prohibited) because it is not creating a permanent structure. But nevertheless, it is rabbinically prohibited (which we *do* follow).

The idea of braiding hair being boneh comes from the Gemara in Shabbat 95a. There, Chazal explain that when God made Chava, God built her from Adam's rib (boneh) and adorned her with beautiful braids before introducing her to Adam. And so, if God built her using braids, when we braid, there is a divine aspect of building that the rabbis codify as halacha.

Now what if your daughter braided her hair before Shabbat, can she undo it? Like many melachot, the inverse of the melacha also raises a question. How so? Undoing a braid is prohibited under the melacha of soter (demolition), since anything that is prohibited to build (boneh) is also prohibited to destroy (soter).

Now, what about braiding a sheitel? Surprisingly, the answer involves a totally different melacha-- braiding a sheitel is considered a rabbinic violation of the melacha of oraig (weaving), since it is considered similar to weaving wool after it has been removed from the animal (oraig applies to materials that have been removed from the source). For this reason, women will often style their sheitels before Shabbat or make twists with the hair instead of braids so as to avoid boneh. Twists are permitted for hair that is attached to your head as well, since they don't hold in the same way braids do.

But it's worth noting that telling a girl not to braid her hair can be a complicated conversation. The Mishneh Berurah actually says that if women are going to braid their hair regardless of the prohibition, we should not tell them that it is prohibited, so they do not move from transgressing beshogeg (without knowing) to bemeizid (intentionally). But if someone wants to know and follow the halacha, then the bottom line answer is that it is prohibited to braid hair on Shabbat.

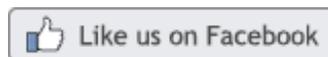
Dan lechaf zechut, if you see someone with braided hair on Shabbat, perhaps they did it before Shabbat and plan to leave it in all day!

Join us next time for Shabbat Shorts when we will explore another example of boneh!

I love feedback!
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