



# B'NAI DAVID-JUDEA

## Shabbat Shorts

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A story is told about the Chafetz Chaim (and/or possibly somebody else): At the Chafetz Chaim's table one Shabbat, a guest accidentally spilled his drink. Upon seeing his guest's embarrassment, the Chafetz Chaim promptly spilled his own drink, and said, "What a rickety table this is! I've really got to get this fixed."

To my knowledge, the story does not go on to describe how they then went about cleaning up the mess. But perhaps we can figure it out :)

Here's the basic question when it comes to mopping up on Shabbat: Does the prohibition on using a sponge to wash dishes (on the grounds of "squeezing out / laundering", per Tuesday's Shabbat Short) extend to using a rag to sop up a spill? Perhaps it should, for as the rag becomes saturated, it also becomes quite "squeeze out-able"!

Quite possibly you are already intuiting the basic *halachic* difference between the two cases though. When mopping a spill, your intention is specifically to *absorb* the liquid, not to squeeze it out. Thus any squeezing, certainly while you are still actively engaged in the mopping up, would be counter-productive. As such, the *Halacha* does not regard the rag case as being analogous to using a sponge to wash dishes. The only concern that *is* raised in the *halachic* discussion is about the possibility that you might come to ring the rag out *after the mopping up is done*. This is how that discussion proceeds:

(a) If the liquid that is being mopped up is anything other than water, then you're totally in the clear. For as you recall, the *halachic* concern here is connected to laundering, i.e. that when squeezing the liquid out you are performing the final step of the *melacha* of laundering. But this only applies when the liquid involved is water. (When's the last time you tried washing clothing with grape juice?!)

(b) If the liquid you're mopping up *is* water, then as long as the item you're using is an actual *rag* (as opposed to a piece of clothing for example), the *Halacha* chooses to not be concerned with the possibility that you will forget yourself and squeeze it out on Shabbat, for a rag is something that we generally don't mind leaving unsqueezed until after Shabbat is over. The hypothetical stringent alternative position is not even considered, I think, because it would result in a completely impractical situation, give that we are

commanded to eat and drink on Shabbat!

Which brings me to one last, important point: Paper towels should be prepared *before Shabbat*. While tearing paper is permissible on Shabbat when we need to gain access to food or even to things like napkins or silverware, it is generally not permissible otherwise, in particular when we are tearing the paper into a specific, useful shape (e.g. a 12" x 12" square, as opposed to a 200 foot piece on a roll.)

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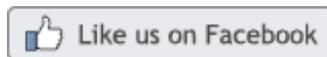
In the near future, we'll take a look at some other *Halachot* that come into play when we wash dishes on Shabbat. And as always we'll be looking for the ways in which the *Halacha* enables us to keep our kitchens presentable and "shabbosdik", without compromising on our understanding of the *melachot* of Shabbat.

I love feedback!  
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