



B'NAI DAVID-JUDEA

Shabbat Shorts

Welcome to another year of Shabbat Shorts! Rabbanit Alissa and I will be endeavoring to address very practical matters that arise in our weekly Shabbat observance. We do so with the idea that while Shabbat isn't ultimately about the minutiae, our careful observance of the halachot is what, in the aggregate, creates the space and environment in which Shabbat can fully come to life. So they're important! Rabbanit Alissa and I are always happy to answer your Halachic questions, and we're also interested in hearing from you about topics that you'd like us to address.

We'll start off with the related issues of using a sponge to wash dishes, and using a rag to clean up spills. On the one hand, our desire and obligation to honor Shabbat requires us to clean our homes before Shabbat, and to endeavor to keep them neat and presentable throughout Shabbat. On the other hand, there are definitely some *melacha* categories that can be triggered by certain methods of clean-up. And on the third hand, we can typically achieve both goals if we are mindful of how we are doing things.

Let's begin with sponges. What's the deal with a sponge? The key *halachic* concept here is that while a sponge is not an olive or a grape (or an apple or a lemon), there is nonetheless a סחיטה ("squeezing out") issue that pertains. The issue is NOT the same "squeezing out" issue that pertains to fruit (which is a derivative of **threshing**), rather a distinct issue that is a derivative of the *melacha* of **laundering**. Though our washing machines tend to do it for us these days, squeezing water out of fabrics is - and always was - an indispensable step in the process of **laundering clothing**. So the argument goes that applying a wet sponge to a dish in such a way that the water will invariably be squeezed out, presents a *halachic* issue on Shabbat derived from the category of laundering. True, a sponge isn't an article of clothing, but it is a water-absorbing substance whose cleanliness is important to us.

(It is also true of course that our intention when we wash dishes is NOT the laundering of the sponge per se, rather the washing of the dish. But since the water's being squeezed out is *inevitable*, and we in fact do *desire* for the water to leave the sponge, the act is considered as if intentional.)

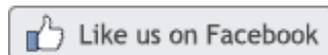
Based on all this, the Gemara (Shabbat 143a) forbids the use of a sponge on Shabbat "unless it is equipped with a leather handle". Rashi, Rambam and many others presume that the "leather handle" actually prevents "squeezing out" from happening. Ra'avad of Provence observes that some sort of squeezing must still be happening, but understands that the Gemara is willing to legally view the sponge-with-handle not so much as a sponge that's being squeezed, but more as a container of water that is being emptied. Either way, the Talmud rules that this kind of sponge may be used on Shabbat. In terms of implements we're more familiar with, a sponge-on-a-stick is therefore OK as well. Same is true for a dishwashing *brush* whose bristles are not *halachicly* considered to be absorbent to begin with, thus obviating the entire issue.

More to be said, and more to come!

I love feedback!
ravyosef@bnaidavid.com

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

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