

The Halachos of Cutting Nails

TIMES FOR CUTTING NAILS

- It is a mitzvah for one to cut their nails on Erev Shabbos and Erev Yom Tov (O.C. 260:1). The midrash (brought by the Elya Rabba 260:4) tells a story of a tzaddik who passed away and appeared to his student in a dream with a stain on his forehead. He explained to his student that one of the reasons for the stain was because he was not careful to cut his nails every Erev Shabbos Kodosh. It is commendable for one to proclaim prior to cutting his nails, "LeKavod Shabbos Kodosh"- in honor of the holy Shabbos (Yesod V'shorash Ha'avodah Shaar 8 ch. 1).
- The best time for one to cut his fingernails is on Friday. The Aruch Hashulchan (260:1) writes that if possible, one should wait until Friday afternoon after chatzos (midday) to cut them. Nails begin to grow on the third day after being cut. That being the case, it is not considered kavod Shabbos to cut one's fingernails before Friday as they will begin to grow again on or before Shabbos (Elya Rabba 260:5 cited by M.B. sk6). There is a unique opinion that one should not cut his nails particularly on Thursday, since that will cause them to begin growing on Shabbos which resembles an issur (see Taz 260:1). However, the Mishna Berura and other Acharonim do not take this reason into consideration. If one is unable to cut his nails on Friday, he should cut them on the closest possible day to Shabbos (M.B. sk5).
- Some Acharonim hold that one should not cut his fingernails and toenails on the same day. Accordingly, one should cut his toenails on Thursday and fingernails on Friday (M.B. sk6). (There is more kavod Shabbos

involved with cutting fingernails than toenails since the former is more noticeable. Therefore, it is the fingernails that should be cut on Friday rather than the toenails- Machtzis Hashekel). Other Acharonim (Shaarei Teshuvah 260:2 quoting the Arizal) hold that one may cut both his fingernails and toenails on the same day. Some Acharonim add that the definition of "the same day" is the daytime, followed by the night. The evening prior, although halachically together with the following day, is considered a different day in regard to this halacha (Shemiras Shabbos 42 nt 16, see Ketzos HaShulchan 73:4).

PROPER ORDER

- The Rema (O.C. 260:1) says that when one cuts his nails, he should be careful not to cut them in order. Rather, he should begin with the ring finger on the left hand, followed by the index finger, then go back to the pinky followed by the middle finger and finally the thumb. On the right hand, one should begin with the index finger followed by the ring finger, then go back to the thumb followed by the middle finger and finally the pinky.
- The Aruch Hashulchan says that one should cut the nails on his right hand first, while the Elya Rabba (260:6) quotes the Kal Bo to cut the nails on the left hand first, as is implied by the Rema.
- The Arizal is quoted as mocking the above minhag (Kaf Hachaim 17). However, nearly all of the Poskim write that one should be stringent in this matter, especially since there are those who maintain that it is a sakana (danger) to cut them in order (see Elya Rabba 260:6, Graz 3, MB 7).
- Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlita records that the Chazon Ish was careful to cut his fingernails in the order stated by the Rema, but not his toenails (Sefer Zikaron 2:36). However, not everybody agrees with this. Acharonim point out that the Perisha (241) explicitly states that there is no distinction between fingernails and toenails (see Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasa 42:149,

Shemiras Haguf V'hanefesh 68 nt 14).

PROPER DISPOSAL

- The Gemara (Niddah 17a) states that after one cut his nails, they must be disposed of in a way that will ensure that a pregnant woman will not step over them. If a pregnant woman were to walk on them, it can chas v'shalom result in a miscarriage. Gedolim such as the Chofetz Chaim (Toras Yoledes 60:9) and Rav Moshe Feinstein (Mesores Moshe) were very stringent in this matter, going to extremes to get rid of nails properly.
- Although Chazal say that the best solution is to burn the nails, Poskim say that flushing them down the toilet is a viable alternative, especially if one will not be able to burn it right away (see Perisha 241:4, Chut Shani Shabbos 1:62, Nishmas Shabbos 56)
- If one cuts (or bites) his nails in a place that only men enter (ex. Some batei midrashim, men's mikvah etc.), it is permitted to let them fall on the floor, since women aren't found there.
- If one accidentally drops a nail on the floor in his house and he can't find it, he should sweep up the area, because once the nail moves from the original place of falling, it becomes harmless (Perisha ibid). (The Elya Rabba questions whether it has to be swept out of the room in order to become harmless. M.B. sk6 cites his opinion). According to the Pri Chodosh (Y.B. 117:sk9), this is only true if the nails fell accidentally. However, if he put them down intending to move them later on, they don't become harmless upon arriving to their second location.
- This concern extends to the cut nails of non-Jews as well (Dayan Fuerst shlita, see the journal Alibah DeHilchasa 47 pg. 39 for various sources as to the opinion of Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlita). Therefore, an expectant woman should avoid going to a nail salon, in order to avoid this danger. One who has a need to do so should discuss possible solutions with her Rav.

WASHING HANDS

- One who cuts his fingernails or toenails should wash his hands afterwards (O.C. 4:18 see Ketzos Hashulchan siman 2:11).
- If one nail is bitten, Chazon Ish holds that one doesn't

need to wash his hands. (see sefer Shemiras Haguf V'hanefesh siman 68:22 and footnotes). According to Hagaon R' Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l, even if one bites all of his nails, he does not need to wash his hands (as heard from Harav Dovid Zucker Shlita).

ROSH CHODESH AND CHOL HAMOED

- In accordance with R' Yehudah Hachasid, some do not cut their nails on Rosh Chodesh. The Mishnah Berurah and others follow this even if Rosh Chodesh falls out on Erev Shabbos (MB 7 from the Magen Avraham). (Some say that if there are two days of Rosh Chodesh it is permitted to cut them on the first day, see Shemiras Haguf V'hanefesh 68:9).
- Some Acharonim deliberate if the evening of Rosh Chodesh is included in this minhag. Therefore, with cutting nails in honor of Shabbos, one may be lenient to cut nails on Thursday evening of Rosh Chodesh (Ketzos HaShulchan 73:4, see Kovetz Halachos Shabbos 1 ft. 77)
- One may not cut his nails during Chol HaMoed, unless he cut them on Erev Yom Tov. However, it is permitted to bite or cut them with one's fingers on Chol HaMoed (M.B. 532:1). It is also permitted to cut them on Erev Shabbos or Erev the last days of Yom Tov if it is his practice to cut them on every Erev Shabbos during the year. (Be'er Heitiv 532:1, S.S.K Ch. 66 note 136) (See also Aruch Hashulchan 532:2).

