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**HALACHA**

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# Haircuts During Sefirat Ha'omer in Light of the Current Situation

As Israel begins to ease restrictions and businesses begin to open - including barbershops and hairdressers - is it permissible to get a haircut during Sefirat Ha'omer?

The customs of mourning we observe during the period of Sefirat Ha'omer are attributed to the death of the students of Rabbi Akiva, who died between Pesach and Shavuot (Yevamot 62b). Though some customs of mourning were added later, following the First Crusades of 1096, the Chmielnicki Massacres, and other tragedies throughout Jewish history.

According to tradition, Rabbi Akiva's students stopped dying on the 33rd day of the Omer (See Meiri to Yevamot 62b). And while customs vary, most Ashkenazim abstain from cutting their hair from

Pesach until the 33rd day of the Omer, while Eidot Hamizrach wait until the 34th day of the Omer. Others observe customs of mourning from the beginning of the month of Iyyar until Shavuot (See Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 493:2-3).

The customs of mourning during Sefirat Ha'omer are not more stringent than Chol Hamoed

But an individual who was unable to get a haircut before Pesach due to the lockdown or quarantine or illness is permitted to get a haircut during Sefirat Ha'omer.

Our Sages prohibited cutting hair or shaving during Chol Hamo'ed in order that one "will not enter the holiday disheveled," waiting until Chol Hamo'ed to cut his hair (Moed Katan 14a). Instead, one is obligated to cut his hair or shave before the onset of the holiday (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 531:1). The Mishnah (Mo'ed Katan 3:1), however, allows for "one who has returned from from a trip overseas, one released from captivity, one released from prison, and one whom the Sages released from his excommunication," to cut their hair on Chol Hamoed. The Talmud (Moed Katan 14a) expand this to include anyone

who is unable to cut their hair for reasons beyond their control (Ones), so long as their situation is evident and known to others.

One who was unable to cut their hair due to COVID-19 would certainly be considered an Ones, as the circumstance was beyond his control. Similarly, as everyone has been in lockdown or quarantine, the situation is clear, evident, obvious and known to all.

The Bi'ur Halacha (Orach Chayim 493:2), citing the Pri Megadim, rules that the above dispensation applies to the period of mourning during Sefirat Ha'omer as well, as the customs of mourning during Sefirat Ha'omer are not more stringent than Chol Hamoed. One unable to cut his hair before Pesach due to circumstances beyond his control may cut his hair during Sefirat Ha'omer.

While Rav Moshe Feinstein disagrees that the above dispensation applies to Sefirat Ha'omer and rules stringently, he concludes that we may be lenient and allow a haircut for "one who is already very dishevelled" (Igrot Moshe, Orach Chayim 2:96).

As Rosh Chodesh Iyyar fell on Friday and Shabbat this year, the Mishnah Berurah rules one may cut their hair in honor of Shabbat Rosh Chodesh, due to the additional joy (See Mishnah Berurah 493:5). Similarly, one may cut their hair in honor of Yom Ha'atzmaut. But if that was not done, one in need of a haircut is permitted to get a haircut during Sefirat Ha'omer, preferably before Shabbat, in order to give honor to Shabbat. ■

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