

# Shaving the Beard - A Simple *Heter*?

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To the outstanding and G-d fearing scholar, strong fighter who achieves wonders, Rabbi Moshe Wiener, Shlita:

I send you my most friendly greetings. Thank you for your letters which I was unable to answer until now.

It is most difficult for me to give my true opinion concerning the prohibition of shaving one's beard with electric shavers. I feel caught between my concern for doing G-d's will and coming out with the truth, and the prodding of the Yetzer Hora not to speak out on the subject.

As a matter of fact, I have written a lengthy Halachic manuscript on the question, based upon the Gemora (Makkos 21, Nozir 39a) and the Rishonim and Achronim (including the Shulchan Oruch Yoreh Deah 181 where Rabbi Moshe Isserles - Ramo - brings from Terumas Hadeshen 295; also the Chasam Sofer Yoreh Deah 139-140, and Responsa of the Chidah - Rabbi Chaim Yosef Dovid Azulai - No. 52, and many more).

But to tell the sorry truth, I am afraid to publish it, for many have already become accustomed to being lenient in this matter, though they are Jews faithful to G-d and his Torah.

**Halachically speaking, I have found no grounds for permitting such electric shavers.**

The Almighty Himself will bear witness that I have toiled to find some justification for those who are lenient in this question and whom nobody has the courage to rebuke. And yet, despite all my efforts and constant searching, I could find no reliable grounds to support it.

My heart feels broken within me when I consider: what will the saintly Rabbis and scholars of our time reply when an answer will be demanded of them why they did not announce in public **at the very least** that there are grave doubts concerning the permissibility of electric shavers?

**Whoever seeks to protect his soul will most certainly keep away from them!**

I am especially upset by the question of how our Jewish brothers who use these shaving machines will possibly overcome their habit of so many years and stop using them. I just don't know where to turn when I think about their predicament.

At the time when I wrote my observations on the aforementioned Gemora passages (of Makos and Nozir), I considered in my mind and decided that it must be that I am making a mistake to think such wrong thoughts that all those using shaving machines are G-d forbid transgressing grave and severe prohibitions almost every day. Now, however, I see that my own conclusions correspond to the true **majority of Halachic opinions of past and present**, as you, my esteemed Rabbi, have shown (in Sefer "Hadras Ponim - Zokon").

In light of the above, it would be totally wrong to remain silent and say "it is better for them to transgress unknowingly (than to transgress willfully)," for in a matter concerning the Jewish public in a specific Torah prohibition in which many are ensnared and receive no rebuke this rule does not apply. Particularly in a situation where the younger generation will be misled by the previous generation it is certainly forbidden to say this...

I do not, G-d forbid, wish to bring any blame against any those of our generation who are ensnared in this sin. But I must express my deep pain on this subject. Perhaps they will find some justification for what they do. If, however, they do not, then the saintly and scholarly Rabbis of our generation, Shlita, must do their duty and publicize the importance of avoiding this prohibition.

Incidentally, the lenient ruling on this point which is supposed to emanate from the outstanding authority, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, (Shlita), is not understood by me, nor do I believe it true that he indeed ruled thus.

I will conclude with a wish that "G-d grant peace, goodness and blessing" - "prosper and ride forth for words of truth!" May you be privileged to bring merit to the Jewish public, and may their merit attributed to you.

**Moshe Stern**  
**Rabbi of Debrecyn**



*For a comprehensive treatment of this subject, see*

**Sefer Hadrass Ponim - Zokon / by Rabbi Moshe Wiener / The Cutting and Growth of the Beard in Halachic Perspective / Published with the Endorsements of the Leading Halachic Authorities of our Times / 800 pages (in expanded second edition) / Available at all Jewish Bookstores / Distributed by Z. Berman Books**