

# דע מה שתשיב...

## How to Respond to those who challenge the ruling of the Tzemach Tzedek zt'l regarding cutting the beard

by

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In a lengthy and intricate halachic responsum (*Sha'alos U'teshuvos Tzemach Tzedek, Y.D. 93*), the Tzemach Tzedek demonstrates that one of the reasons to forbid shaving and trimming the beard is the prohibition of "*Lo Yilbash*" (*Parshas Ki Setzei 22:5*), which proscribes cross dressing between genders. Various sources have taken exception to this ruling, including in recent forums and publications. In the spirit of דע מה שתשיב, following is guidance how to respond to those who may dispute the Tzemach Tzedek's opinion on this matter.



**THE TZEMACH TZEDEK ZT'L WRITES THAT THE TRANSGRESSION OF *LO YILBASH* IS RELEVANT TO CUTTING THE BEARD. IS HIS POSITION ACCEPTED OR REJECTED BY THE POSKIM?**

### Claim:

In the *marei mekomos* to the halachah forums entitled *Shavers and Beards*, a comment was made regarding the position of the Tzemach Tzedek to prohibit shaving and trimming the beard (also) because of *lo yilbash*, as follows: "If you look at our *marei mekomos*, you will see a number of Acharonim who were similarly mystified at the logic of the great Tzemach Tzedek. Which is why the Shulchan Aruch as well as the vast majority of Acharonim disagree with him."

### Response:

The sources which dispute the Tzemach Tzedek's position regarding the relevance of *lo yilbash* to shaving and trimming the beard (e.g., *Seridei Eish 2:81; Igros Moshe Y.D. 2:6*) **all operated on the premise that this concept was originated by the Tzemach Tzedek.**

### This premise, however, is erroneous.

The reality is that there are sources in Rishonim and Acharonim (and even from a Tanna), who preceded the Tzemach Tzedek, that state that *lo yilbash* is applicable to the removal of the beard, just as the Tzemach Tzedek posits (and some even cite the same Talmudic basis as the Tzemach Tzedek).

**These Rishonim and Acharonim were unknown to those who argued against the Tzemach Tzedek.** This is evident from the fact that those who argue against the Tzemach Tzedek **make no mention whatsoever** of the earlier sources which are aligned with the Tzemach Tzedek's position.

**It is thus unlikely that those who argued against the Tzemach Tzedek would reject his position if they knew that it was shared by Rishonim and Acharonim who preceded the Tzemach Tzedek.**

[In truth, the Tzemach Tzedek himself was apparently unaware of the Rishonim and

Acharonim who preceded him and wrote that *lo yilbash* applies to shaving, for he makes no mention of them either.]

The earliest source which expressly associated *lo yilbash* with shaving is **Targum Yonasan** (by the Tanna Rabi Yonasan ben Uziel), cited by our own generation's Gadol Hador, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, in his *sefer Orchos Yosher* (ch. 5):

ובתרגום יונתן אי' שעובר בזה משום לא ילבש גבר שמתל אשה והיינו אפי' אם מספר במספרים וכ"כ החינוך והוסיף שעובר משום ובחוקותיהם לא תלכו והביאו החפץ חיים בספר המצות הקצר (ל"ת קע"ז). ומרן החזו"א מאד לא היתה דעתו נוחה מזה.

**Targum Yonasan states that one who does this transgresses the prohibition of "A man shall not wear a woman's dress," which includes even cutting the beard with scissors. Sefer Hachinuch states the same, adding that one also transgresses the prohibition of "You shall not follow their [non-Jewish] practices." This is quoted by the Chofetz Chaim in his Sefer HaMitzvos HaKotzer (Prohibition 177).**

[Allow it to be noted that:

- The Targum Yonasan was a **Tanna** — Rabi Yonoson ben Uziel.
- For an in-depth analysis regarding the Targum Yonasan as a basis to prohibit removing the beard due to *lo yilbash*, see the *sefer Hadrash Ponim Zokon* Section 1, pp. 33-37.
- The Tzemach Tzedek makes no mention of this Targum Yonasan in his entire lengthy *teshuvah*.
- Rav Chaim Kanievsky makes **no mention of the Tzemach Tzedek**, thus underscoring that the connection between *lo yilbash* and the beard is not based solely on the Tzemach Tzedek.]

#### **RISHONIM WHO STATE EXPRESSLY THAT LO YILBASH APPLIES TO SHAVING INCLUDE:**

- The Ravan (grandfather of the Rosh, in his *sefer Maamar Haskel* — quoted in *Hadrash Ponim Zokon* Section 1, p. 67);
- *Sefer Hamanbig* (quoted in *Hadrash Ponim Zokon* p. 105);
- *Shibolei HaLeket* (2:41 — quoted in *Hadrash Ponim Zokon* p. 117. Also see the new edition of *Shibolei Haleket*, where the publisher notes in footnote 3 that the *Shibolei Haleket* is a support for what the Tzemach Tzedek wrote centuries later);<sup>1</sup>
- Rabbeinu Chaim Paltiel (quoted in *Hadrash Ponim Zokon*, fourth ed., p. 689);
- Rabbeinu Asher from Lunil (quoted in *Hadrash Ponim Zokon*, fourth ed., p. 690).
- Others demonstrate that this was also the position of the Rashba (see *Klei Chemdah*, Parshas Ki Tetzei, sec. 7 and other sources, quoted in *Hadrash Ponim Zokon* Section 1, pp. 115-116).

#### **ACHARONIM (BEFORE THE TIME OF THE TZEMACH TZEDEK) WHO WRITE THAT LO YILBASH APPLIES TO THE BEARD INCLUDE MAJOR POSKIM SUCH AS:**

- The Chacham Tzvi (quoted in *Hadrash Ponim Zokon* Section 1, p. 171);
- his son Rav Yaakov Emden (quoted in *Hadrash Ponim Zokon* Section 1, p. 185); and
- the Chasam Sofer (in *Shaalos u'Teshuvos Chasam Sofer Hachadashos* sec. 30.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> וראה גם להמהדיר של המהדורה החדשה דס' שבלי הלקט חלק שני סימן מא הערה 3: "בתשובת צמח צדק יש משום לא ילבש מדאורייתא...ומסיק שיש בזה דין דאורייתא, וודאי ששיטת רבינו [השבלי הלקט] שלפנינו היא יסוד חזק לשיטתו"

<sup>2</sup> In that *teshuvah*, the Chasam Sofer (who in this *teshuvah* also states that *chukos hagoyim* does apply to shaving, reversing his position from what he had written previously) states that both *lo yilbash* and *chukos hagoyim* would not apply in a beardless society. (However, this lenient position is disputed by many Poskim — see *Hadrash Ponim Zokon* Section 2, ch. 4 fn. 4, and ch. 3 fn. 24 at length.

After the time of the Tzemach Tzedek, there were also great Poskim who were not “mystified” by his position. They clearly indicated (despite the *heter* codified in Shulchan Aruch) that those who remove their beards are transgressing (also) *lo yilbash*.

They include none other than the **Chofetz Chaim** himself, who (**without making any mention of the Tzemach Tzedek**, yet citing one of the same proofs as the Tzemach Tzedek) wrote in his *sefer Tiferes Odom* (ch. 6):

**One must know that even if on the surface, [merely] styling the beard does not appear to involve a transgression, in truth, it is included in the commandment: “A man should not wear the garment of a woman.” For adorning oneself was permitted only to women.... Proof of this concept is in Shabbos 92b, which states that even picking gray hairs from dark ones is forbidden, because he is endeavoring to enhance his appearance and look younger. Rambam’s view is that this obligates one for lashes; see *Beis Yosef*, Yoreh Deah, sec. 182. Moreover, by doing so, he incites the *yetzer hara* to [tempt] him.**

An entire chapter is dedicated to this topic in the *sefer Hadras Ponim Zokon* (Section 2, ch. 3), where many other later Poskim are quoted. They include a *teshuvah* from the **Rogatchover Gaon**, considered by many as one of the greatest Geonim in the past several centuries. He explains at length (also without mentioning the Tzemach Tzedek) that *lo yilbash* applies to the beard, and concludes:

“לענין איסור לספר הזקן במספרים... באמת הארכתי דודאי אסור מן התורה, רק אינו לוקה...ודאי הוי איסור תורה...יהיו נזהרים מאוד שלא יספרו הזקן כי זה איסור גמור...לא יוסיפו עוד לעשות כו” (ספר שו”ת צפנת פענח ח”ד סימן רנח)

**Concerning the prohibition of *cutting the beard with scissors*...in truth, I have explained at length that *it is certainly a Biblical prohibition*, just that lashes are not administered.... It is definitely a Biblical prohibition.... You should be very careful not to trim the beard, for *this is an absolute prohibition*.... You should desist from doing so.**

*Shaalos u'Teshuvos Tzafnas Paneach,*  
vol. 4, sec. 258

See also ***Shaalos u'Teshuvos Minchas Elazar*** (vol. 2, sec. 48):

”ומ”ש הכותבים המשיגים (בסי’ קל”ב ובסי’ קמ”ח בוילקט יוסף) ע”ד הצמח צדק (החדשות) וכ’ שבודאי אינו לדינא דאל”כ היו מביאים דבריו הבאה”ט וכו’ והחכמת אדם. הנה מה אעשה כי לא ידע עם מי הוא מדבר שהוא הצ”צ להגה”צ מליבאוויטש זצ”ל קרוב לדורנו (שר התורה רבן של ישראל, נכדו ותלמידו של הגה”ק הרב בעל התניא זצ”ל) ואיך שייך להחכ”א והקודמים להביא דבריו, וגם בגוף הדבר מגשש (המשיג) כעור בצהרים נגד מאור השמש דברי הצ”צ הנז’ שכ’ עליו שבענין לא ילבש גבר בודאי דבריו נובעים מתרגום יונתן וכו’ וע”ז השיג ובאמת לא כ’ שם בצ”צ מדברי התרגום יונתן כלל רק האריך בכל פרט ופרט בגוף ההלכה דלא ילבש גבר ולא ראה כלל התשו’ סי’ צ”ג בצ”צ הנז’ המחזקת שמונה דפים גדולים ומלאים על כל גדותיהם בעומק ההלכה באיסור תספורת הזקן עיי”ש”.

**In *Vayelaket Yosef*, sec. 132 and sec. 148, the writers who dispute [the obligation to grow a beard] write concerning the Tzemach Tzedek that his words are certainly not accepted as law, for otherwise they would be cited by the *Baer Heitev* and the *Chochmas Odom*.**

**What can I do if the writer does not know the text about which he is writing? We are discussing the Tzemach Tzedek authored close to our time by the Gaon of Lubavitch (the princely master of Torah, leader of the Jewish people, grandson and student of the holy Gaon, the author of the Tanya). How is it possible that the**

This is also addressed by Rav Moshe Sternbuch, who wrote in *Teshuvos v’Hanhagos* vol. 5 sec. 264 that the Vilna Gaon holds that *lo yilbash* applies even under such circumstances.)

***Chochmas Odom* and other writers of previous eras would cite his works?**

**With regard to the matter itself [in taking issue with the Tzemach Tzedek], that writer “feels his way around like a blind man at noon” facing “the light of the sun,” the Tzemach Tzedek. For he writes that [the Tzemach Tzedek’s] words certainly stem from the interpretation given by the Targum Yonasan to the verse: “A man should not wear the garment of a woman,” and bases his disputation on that. The Tzemach Tzedek, however, does not mention the Targum Yonasan at all. Instead, he elaborates on every detail of the prohibition against a man adorning himself as a woman does. [That writer] certainly did not see responsum 93 of the Tzemach Tzedek, which contains eight large pages overflowing with profound halachic explanations regarding the prohibition of cutting the beard.**

The Posek Hador, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, also seems not to have been “mystified” by the position of the Tzemach Tzedek, as was attested to by his grandchildren in the *sefer Halichos Shlomo*:

”היתה דעתו כי הראוי והנכון לגדל הזקן...מלבד שהעיר איך מחמירים בכל הדברים ואילו בזה אין חוששין למש”כ הצמח צדק (ליובאוויטש, חיו”ד סי’ צ”ג) דאית בי’ משום לא ילבש” (כ”כ נכדיו בשמו בס’ הליכות שלמה, הלכות תפלה, ירות”ו, תש”ס, עמ’ יב)

[Our grandfather] held that it is proper to grow a beard. He commented that people act stringently in many other areas, yet here they disregard the opinion of the Tzemach Tzedek that removing the beard involves *lo yilbash*.

*Halichos Shlomo, Hilchos Tefillah, p. 12*

In our times, the late Gadol Hador, **Rav Shteinman**, also accepted that shaving may be prohibited based on *lo yilbash*, and stated:

”ממ”נ לא טוב, אם מגלח במכונה הרי יש חשש לאו דאורייתא וגם אם מגלח עם משחה זה לא חלק, היות ויש אומרים שיש בזה משום: ‘לא ילבש’” (פרי חיים ממרן הרב שטיינמן, שופר ארגון להפצת יהדות, צוות שופר גנזי המלך, כו תמוז תשע”ב)

**“Any method you use to shave your beard will be problematic,” Maran HaRav Shteinman replied. “Using an electric shaver may involve an *issur d’oraysa*. Even using shaving cream is not clearly acceptable, as some say this involves the *issur of lo yilbash*.”**

Similarly, HaGaon Rav Moshe Sternbuch in his responsa *Teshuvos V’Hanhagos* (1:529) accepts the validity of the application of *lo yilbash* to removing the beard. He rules that a son does not have to obey his father who ordered him to shave his beard – even if the father asks him to do so with scissors or depilatory cream, because there are Poskim who prohibit doing so due to the prohibition of *lo yilbash*. [If the father demands that the son use an electric shaver, Rav Sternbuch writes that the son most certainly should not listen to his father].

[It should also be noted that some of the sources which argue against the Tzemach Tzedek apparently never saw his *teshuvah* itself. They simply expressed disagreement with the concept of *lo yilbash* applying to the beard, without having seen the basis of the Tzemach Tzedek’s reasoning. An example of this is the *Igros Moshe*, who makes no mention of the content of the Tzemach Tzedek’s *teshuvah*. He even advances an argument against the Tzemach Tzedek which is responded to by the Tzemach Tzedek himself. It is also of significance that the *Seridei Eish* (vol. 2 section 81), quoted in the forum’s *marei mekomos*, concludes by admitting that his arguments against the Tzemach Tzedek may be refuted. He explains that he is merely trying to find a *zechus* for those who remove their beards, and that those who are strict in accordance with the Tzemach Tzedek should be blessed. Again, it is unlikely they would have taken the position they did if they

would have been aware of the many Rishonim and Acharonim mentioned above.]

To conclude, the ***S'dei Chemed*** was a Sephardi who normally ruled like the *Mechaber* in Shulchan Aruch. He surveyed and compiled the literature of the Poskim concerning this issue, and was certainly qualified to know whether the majority agreed or disagreed with the Tzemach Tzedek. Yet, in his Rabbinic encyclopedia, *S'dei Chemed*, he wrote:

”אך במה שכתב להוכיח ההיתר מדברי הפוסקים אשר מילא כפו מהם כמו שיראה המעיין בדב”ק, אומר אני שאם הי' למראה עיניו כל מה שהארין הגאון צ”צ בתשובה הנ”ל - הי' חוזר בו מסברתו והי' אוסר אף במספריים שלא כעין תער”. (שד”ח מע' הלמ”ד כלל קטז, בנוגע לדברי גאון א' שפסק להקל בגילוח הזקן שלא ע”י תער)

**If [the authority who ruled leniently] had seen the lengthy exposition by the Tzemach Tzedek in the abovementioned responsum, he would have retracted his opinion regarding this issue. He would have ruled that even [trimming the beard with] scissors that are not close-cutting is forbidden....**

**One who sees or hears of [Jews cutting their beards] should raise his voice in rebuke like a shofar. He should not hesitate, despairing that his reprimand will not be heeded, because the disease of this transgression is widespread. Heaven forbid to say this. Jews are holy. If they are rebuked, they will accept it with love. Even if he can save one Jewish soul from this sinful practice, it is considered as if he saved an entire world. I attest to the fact that one of the great rabbis of our generation speaks unceasingly [about this matter], tastefully rebuking [others]. He has turned many away from [this] sin. May G-d enable us to bring merit to people at large and generate favor for our Creator.**

*(Rav Chaim Chizkiya Medini, S'dei Chemed, klalim, lamed, sec. 116)*

P.S. It is troubling that in the *marei mekomos* of a halachah forum, an article from the rabbinical journal *Vayelaket Yosef* is reproduced without including the articles which were published in the **same journal as rejoinders to the article featured in the *marei mekomos***. A multi-year dispute about the issue of shaving was published in this journal in the early 1900s, and to be fair, both sides should have been presented.



**IS IT ACCURATE TO SAY THAT  
THE TZEMACH TZEDEK ZT”L HALACHICALLY  
PROHIBITED ONLY TOTAL REMOVAL  
OF THE BEARD BUT NOT TRIMMING?**

#### **Claim:**

It was stated that the opinion of the Tzemach Tzedek (Y.D. 93) is that the halachic prohibitions involved in removing the beard apply only to shaving the beard entirely, but not to trimming the beard.

#### **Response:**

This is a **gross misrepresentation of the position of the Tzemach Tzedek**. The Tzemach Tzedek writes in his *teshuvah* that shortening/trimming the beard is also forbidden, for various halachic considerations which he discusses. In the words of the Tzemach Tzedek himself:

וא”כ במספריים כעין תער ודאי אסור אך העיקר דאף שלא כעין תער אסור.

Shaving the beard with scissors in a way that is similar to a razor [i.e., close to the skin] is certainly prohibited. However, shaving unlike a razor [i.e., cutting the hairs not close to the skin] is also forbidden.

See also *S'dei Chemed (klalim, Lamed, par. 116)*, who writes (in reference to a Rov who was lenient regarding shaving):

אומר אני שאם הי' למראה עיניו כל מה שהאריך הגאון צמח צדק בתשובה הנ"ל הי' חוזר בו מסברתו והי' אוסר אף במספרים שלא כעין תער (שדי חמד כללים מע' הלמ"ד כלל קט"ז).

If the lenient Rov would have seen all that the Gaon the Tzemach Tzedek wrote in his lengthy *teshuvah*, he would have retracted his opinion in this matter and would have prohibited even trimming the beard.

The *S'dei Chemed's* concluding words regarding this matter are quoted below, chapter 21.



**FOLLOWING ARE CLEAR STATEMENTS BY THE  
LAST THREE LUBAVITCHER REBBES ZT'L  
REGARDING THE POSITION OF THE TZEMACH  
TZEDEK ON TRIMMING THE BEARD:**

**THE REBBE RASHAB ZT'L:**

**מודעה רבה**

לאחב"י מאמינים בני מאמינים, היות כאשר נמצאים רבים המקילין לעצמן להשחית<sup>3</sup> פאת זקנם במספרים ותולים א"ע במה שהובא בשו"ע ואומרים שעושים זאת עפ"י דין דשו"ע, עלינו החיוב להודיע ברבים כי טועים המה כי איסור גמור הוא מדאורייתא כמו שהוכיחו ובררו הרבה גאונים קדמאי ובתראי שעוברים בזה על כמה לאווין וכמו שהוכיח כ"ק אדמו"ר נבג"מ הצ"צ וגם הגאון החכם חזקי' דיא מודינא בשד"ח מביא כמה גאונים ובראשם הגאון בעל מעשה רוקח, וגם הגאון חיד"א בספרו הגדול ברכי יוסף החליט לאיסור חמור... וכאו"א מחויב להודיע לאנשי ביתו האיסור החמור הזה למען לא יהי' שורש שיצמח ממנו

פרה ראש ולענה מב"ב וכל הדברים אשר כתבנו שבוע העברה ידעו שכל הדברים אמורים עפ"י דת תוה"ק ומי שיעבור ע"ז ידע שעון הזה תלוי בראשו, והשומע לדברינו אלה יתברך בברכה מרובה בכט"ס. (אגרות קודש אדמו"ר מוהרש"ב ח"ב ע' תתקכז וש"ת תורת שלום סימן מה)

**Important Announcement**

**To our Jewish brethren, "believers, children of believers":**

**There are many who are lenient and cut their beards with *scissors*. They base their conduct on what is quoted in Shulchan Aruch, declaring that they are acting in accordance with the halachah as stated in Shulchan Aruch.**

**It is our obligation to announce publicly that *they are in error*, for this is *absolutely prohibited (issur gomur)* according to Torah law (*mid'oraysa*). Many of the earlier and later Torah giants (Rishonim and Acharonim) have proven and clarified that those who do so transgress *several* Torah prohibitions (*kamah lavin*) [here the Rebbe Rashab cites source references, including the *teshuvah* of the Tzemach Tzedek]....**

***Everyone is obligated to inform his family members of this severe prohibition (issur chomur), so that a root of [spiritual] decay will not grow from his family. Know that everything we wrote follows the dictate of our holy Torah. Whoever transgresses this should know that the sin is upon his head. By contrast, whoever listens to these words shall be blessed with abundant blessings, with all good forever.***

*Igros Kodesh of the Rebbe Rashab, vol. 2, p. 927, and Shaalos u'Teshuvos Toras Sholom, section 45*

**THE REBBE RAYATZ ZT'L:**

תספורות הזקן...אפילו נגיעה במספרים...להשוות שערות זקנו וליפותם...בענין זה האריך כ"ק אאזמו"ר הצדיק הגאון זצוקללה"ה בספרו צמח

<sup>3</sup> Although the word "להשחית" in general implies total removal of the facial hair (and not just trimming), we find however that the Rebbe Rashab uses this term to refer to (even minimal) trimming of the beard. See his *Igros Kodesh* (vol. 1, #118):

"גם כאשר שמעתי שיש בין כולליו צעירים המשחיתים זקנם ר"ל, גם עליהם (ר"ל על הנוגעים בזקנם בהשחתה כל שהוא, וכ"ש במספרים שלא כעין תער) תחול תוקף הגזירה הזאת, לבלי לתת להם (להעובר לבדו) מן הכולל."

"Also, I have heard that among [the beneficiaries of] our Colel [the Colel Chabad communal fund in the Holy Land] are young men who cut their beards, may the Merciful One save us. Therefore, the full force of this directive — not to give them support from the Colel — applies to them too, namely, to those who touch [cut] their beards even slightly, ("הנוגעים בזקנם בהשחתה כל שהוא") and how much more so to those who trim their beards using scissors."

צדק...ולפי דעתו הקדושה והרחבה, ההלכה והקבלה מתאימות לאיסור...רבינו העלה...דאין זה (הושטת היד בנגיעת הזקן) חומרא ע"פ הקבלה, אלא דהלכה היא...כ"ק אאזמו"ר הגאון הצדיק אסרו, והי' לו מסירת נפש ע"ז...הוא מרא דאתרא בכל מדינתנו ופוסק אחרון לכל המדינות...

כן הוסכם ונתקבל בכל קצוי ארצינו דאסור לקצוץ שערות הזקן, אפילו לנגוע במספרים בשערה אסור, וקבלו זה עליהם כל בית ישראל בחומר קדוש וגם אנשים הפשוטים שאין להם חלק בידיעה...החפצים בקיום נפשם מתרחקים מזה בכל האפשרי ומתחזקים לאסור איסור זה על נפשם...ובשמעם שיש איזהו מקומן מתירין, מתחלחלים, נעשים חולי הנפש לילך אחר הקל ח"ו...

נראה הנסיון היומי בכל עת שאחד בא להקל לעצמו, הוא מפני התאוה, אך מוצא איזו [שיטת] מיקל למען היות לו לכסות עינים, ואין כאן לא מיקל ולא חולק, אלא תאות הלב...הוא איסור עולמי שאין לו התרה. (תשובת כ"ק אדמו"ר מוהרי"צ נ"ע, נדפסה בקובץ יגדיל תורה נ"י. סיון-תמוז ה'תשמ"ג סס"א)

**Concerning cutting the beard...even trimming with scissors...even in order to straighten the hair of the beard and style them...my holy grandfather, the *tzaddik* and *gaon*, of blessed memory, discussed this at length in his work, *Tzemach Tzedek*. According to his holy and expansive view, Halachah and Kabbalah coincide in this case that it is forbidden. He holds...that trimming the beard even slightly is not merely a kabbalistic stringency, but a matter forbidden by Halachah. My grandfather, the *gaon* and *tzaddik*, forbade it, and he had self-sacrifice regarding this issue. He is the supreme halachic authority in our entire country, and the final halachic decisor for all countries....**

**It has been agreed and accepted in all parts of our country that it is forbidden to cut the hairs of the beard; it is even forbidden to trim the hair with scissors. The entire house of Israel have accepted this upon themselves with an attitude of holy severity. Even simple folk with no**

**advanced knowledge...but who desire to preserve their souls take all measures to distance themselves from this, and are firm in considering this to be forbidden. When they hear that there are places where people are lenient, they are horrified; they regard those people as being spiritually ill for following such a leniency, G-d forbid...**

**Daily experience has shown that whenever someone wishes to adopt a leniency, it stems from his passions. He finds some lenient opinion as a pretext, but in reality it has nothing to do with a lenient or dissenting opinion; it is merely the lust of his heart.**

**[Trimming the beard] is a permanent, irrevocable prohibition.**

*Responsum of the Rebbe Rayatz, printed in Kovetz Yagdil Torah, New York, Sivan-Tammuz 5743, sec. 61*

#### **THE LATE LUBAVITCHER REBBE ZT'L:**

At the end of a lengthy analysis of the *teshuva* of the Tzemach Tzedek (published in *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 1, pgs. 3-13), the final ruling of the *Tzemach Tzedek* is summarized by the Lubavitcher Rebbe (*ibid.* p. 13) as follows:

"המורם מתשובה זו דגילוח הזקן במספרים אף שלא כעין תער אסור מן התורה, וגם חייב מלקות משום לא ילבש גבר (וקצת מספקא לי' להצ"צ בחיוב מלקות). וכ"ז במקום הפאות - הן לאסור דלא תשחיתו, הן לאסור דלי"ג [לא ילבש גבר], אלא דאנן לא בקיאי במקום הפאות ולכן אסור מספק בכל מקום."

**The conclusion of this *teshuva* [of the Tzemach Tzedek] is that cutting the beard with scissors, even if they are not close-cutting, is forbidden by Torah law and also incurs the punishment of *malkos* (lashes) due to the prohibition of *lo yilbash* (and the Tzemach Tzedek is slightly uncertain about the liability of *malkos*). This applies [if one cuts facial hair] in the location of the [five] *payos* [the sections of the face which are**

halachically part of the beard] – [Cutting the beard with even non-close cutting scissors in the *payos* areas is forbidden] **both because of the prohibition of *lo yilbash* and because of *lo sashchis* [*eis pas zekanecha* – *Kedoshim* 19:27, the intrinsic negative commandment prohibiting beard removal]. [Nowadays,] **this** [cutting the beard with even non-close cutting scissors] **is forbidden anywhere on the face, since we no longer are expert in the exact location of the *payos*.**”**

In another letter, the Lubavitcher Rebbe wrote:

בנוגע לענין גידול הזקן... לדעת אדמו"ר הצמח צדק וכו"כ פוסקים לפניו וגם לאחריו, הוא איסור ברור מן התורה, כמבואר בשו"ת שלו, ובהוספה עליהם – בפסקי דינים שלו. ועיין ג"כ בדרכי תשובה על היר"ד. ובשו"ת מנחת אלעזר ח"ב סמ"ח. וקבץ כמה דיעות בהנ"ל ובארוכה הן ע"פ נגלה והן ע"פ פנימיות התורה בספר עמודי ארזים להרב מרגלית שי מירושלים עיה"ק ת"ו, שהעתיק דברים נפלאים וגם מבהילים בנוגע לגידול הזקן ולהפכו. – ושם גם מכתב הגאון הרגצובי (הר"י רוזין) שזהו איסור גמור. (לקוטי שיחות ח"ב ע' 206; אג"ק חכ"ב ע' תצ)

**With regard to growing the beard... according to the Rebbe the Tzemach Tzedek and many halachic authorities who preceded him and followed him, [cutting the beard] involves a clear Scriptural prohibition, as he explains in his responsa and with further elaboration in his *Piskei Dinim*. See also *Darchei Teshuvah* to *Yoreh Deah* and the collection of responsa, *Minchas Elazar*, vol. 2, sec. 48. Several perspectives — according to both the revealed dimension of Torah and its inner, mystical dimension — are comprehensively collected in the *sefer Amudei Arazim* (Jerusalem), by R. Margolis. He cites wondrous and awe-inspiring points both with regard to growing the beard and its opposite. He also includes a letter**

**from the Rogatchover *Gaon* (R. Yosef Rosen) which states that [cutting the beard with scissors] is an outright prohibition (*issur gomur*).**

*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 12, p. 206;  
*Igros Kodesh*, vol. 22, p. 490

See also *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 7, p. 325, where it states that **even slightly trimming the beard to straighten it is included in the Tzemach Tzedek's ruling:**

לכתבו אודות גידול הזקן שיש מציעים "לישר" אותו. אינו ברור מה כוונתו בתיבת לישר. – ולדעתי ע"פ כתבו – אין מקום לגזוז אפילו בכדי לישר, כי – אם בהנוגע למנהג טוב שנהגו כמה פעמים זמן צריך להתבונן איך להפסיק בהנהגתו – עאכו"כ בכגון דא שאדמו"ר הצמח צדק פוסק שזהו לא מנהג טוב, כי אם חיוב. (לקוטי שיחות ח"ז ע' 325; אגרות קודש ח"כ ע' קפב)

You write that some people have suggested that you “straighten” your beard. I am not sure what you mean with the word “straighten.” According to my opinion and based on my understanding of your words, you should not trim your beard even if you are only doing so to straighten it. Even if this would involve any other good practice that you kept for a while and did several times, you would need to consider how to discontinue it. All the more so regarding not trimming the beard, which, as the Tzemach Tzedek rules, is not just a good practice but a halachic obligation.

*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 7, p. 325;  
*Igros Kodesh*, vol. 20, p. 182

It should also be emphasized that the position of the Tzemach Tzedek that the prohibition of *lo yilbash* applies to cutting the beard is not a *chiddush* of the Tzemach Tzedek. It has sources in Rishonim and Acharonim before and after the Tzemach Tzedek, as documented in the *sefer Hadras Ponim Zokon* (Section 2, ch. 3) and discussed at length above.

