

The Halachic Status of Shaving Machines



BEFORE ASKING “WHY,” ASK “WHETHER” A Critical Analysis of and Response to an article entitled “Why Electric Shavers Are Permitted” in the Teves/December 2015 issue of The Kuntris Torah Magazine

The article “Why Electric Shavers Are Permitted” in the Teves/December 2015 issue of *The Kuntris Torah Magazine* is plagued with inaccuracies, misrepresentations and misleading omissions.

Before addressing the specific content of the article, a few general points regarding its overall message are in order:

Rav Moshe Sternbuch shlita wrote (in a letter published in the sefer *Hadrus Ponim Zokon* p. 35; see similarly in his *Teshuvos V’Hanhagos* 1:459 and 5:264):

“Who can dare rule leniently on a Torah question that involves transgressing the *issur de’oraysa* of shaving the beard for which both the one shaving and the one being shaved are equally liable, amounting to a total of ten sins (if one shaves himself)? Rabbeinu Nissim of Gerona (the Ran) writes that a sin that incorporates several prohibitions is just as severe as *chilul Shabbos* (which carries the capital punishment of *sekilab*). Just imagine, then, the consequences of violating ten prohibitions on a day-to-day basis! Who would want to place himself in such a position? Anyone aware of the severity of this transgression and its punishment will keep far away from these machines.

“I am sure that if we will explain the problems involved, and present the opinions of the outstanding authorities of our time who ruled that shaving machines are prohibited (including the saintly Chofetz Chaim, Chazon Ish, and Rabbi Aharon Kotler, of blessed memory), then anyone with the slightest degree of yiras

Shomayim will keep far away from these machines and totally avoid their use.”

It is thus inconceivable for an article to be published discussing a transgression that is equal to (or exceeds) the sin of *chilul Shabbos* in severity – and nonetheless only cites the lenient opinion of one posek (a “*daas yachid*”), and totally omits and disregards the positions of the greatest Poskim of our times who ruled that all electric shavers are forbidden!

It is particularly disconcerting that such an article was published in *Kuntris Magazine*. *Kuntris Magazine* consistently presents Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlita as our Gadol Hador and prolifically quotes his opinion regarding a plethora of topics. Yet regarding the issue of electric shavers and shaving in general (concerning which the stringent position of Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlita is well documented – see his *Orchos Yosher*, Chapter 5, where he quotes Rishonim who prohibit even trimming the beard with scissors and certainly prohibit all shaving machines) – no mention whatsoever is made of his ardent stance.

Now, after having made these general remarks, let us move to the details mentioned in the article, in the order they appear there.



☞ “Rav Moshe Feinstein zt’l had told Rav Michel Shurkin shlit’a on several occasions that all the gedolim in America permitted one to use an electric shaver.”

Response:

1) This *oral* assertion of something said by Rav Moshe Feinstein zt’l is disputed and refuted by

what was *written* by the other Gadol Hador in America, the contemporary of Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l, namely, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt'l (who was certainly familiar with Rav Moshe Feinstein's position regarding shaving with electric shavers). In his sefer *Emes L'Yaakov* on *Shulchan Aruch* (Y.D. 181) Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt'l wrote (to his grandson) that there is no "mesorah" from the Rabbonim in America that can be relied upon to permit the use of electric shavers. To quote Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt'l:

"Regarding [the prohibition of using] machines to shave [the beard], this is not just a chumra [halachic strictness] but a substantive [halachic] issue... In fact, I do not know whether the great Torah authorities (Gedolim) of America [ever] explicitly permitted them; it is possible that they kept silent because no one asked them [their opinion], and they avoided the issue, knowing that their words would not be heeded... It is difficult to rely on [any] tradition (mesora) [to be lenient]."

As is well known, Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l greatly respected the halachic decisions of Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt'l, to the extent that Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l personally used a timer on his refrigerator on Shabbos, to avoid Rav Yaakov's stringent ruling on opening refrigerators on Shabbos, even though Rav Moshe himself had written a teshuva permitting it.

We should also mention that in a letter dated 6 Shevat 5774, Rav Yaakov's son, Rav Noson Kamenetzky, wrote to Rav Hillel Dovid Litwack of Flatbush (author of many sefarim): "I hereby attest that my father [Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky] never, ever permitted shaving machines."

2) Furthermore, regarding the aforementioned American "mesorah," the other "Gadol" in America (of similar stature to Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l and Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt'l) – was Rav Aharon Kotler zt'l. According to the testimony of Rav Aharon Kotler zt'l's major talmidim (such as R' Moshe Heinemann, R' Eliya Ber Wachtfogel, R' Yechiel Perr, and others in letters published in the sefer *Hadras Ponim Zokon* 2:1), Rav Aharon

Kotler ruled that electric shavers are absolutely prohibited. In fact, Rav Aharon Kotler zt'l told R' Menachem Perr zt'l that he may not give electric shavers to his non-religious congregants to use instead of razors (see sefer *Hadras Ponim Zokon* 2:1. This is also related in a letter written by his son, R' Yechiel Perr shlita, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Derech Ayson in Far Rockaway, printed in the *Miluyim* to sefer *Hadras Ponim Zokon*).

Additionally, Rav Aharon Kotler zt'l's grandson, Rav Malkiel Kotler shlita, along with the other Roshei Yeshiva of Lakewood, wrote a public letter (which was posted on the Beth Medrash Gavoha bulletin board) attesting that Rav Aharon Kotler zt'l considered electric shavers as being prohibited.

3) The "first American Gadol," Rav Gedaliah Schorr zt'l, Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Vodaas [this expression calling Rav Schorr the "first American Gadol" was coined by Rav Aharon Kotler zt'l], prohibited shaving machines (although he was certainly aware of the Igros Moshe's opinion regarding this issue).

In his *haskama* to the sefer *Hadras Ponim Zokon* (an encyclopedic work on the beard in Jewish law which explains the prohibition of shaving machines at length), Rav Gedaliah Schorr called the sefer a "*chibur nifla*" and "*sefer yakar*." He continues to write that the Gedolim of both previous generations *and our generation* were concerned that the use of shaving machines involves a Torah prohibition, and that all b'nei Torah should learn the sefer so they will avoid a severe Torah prohibition.

4) Another "American Gadol," Rav Yitzchok Hutner zt'l (Rosh Yeshivas Chaim Berlin), attested that Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski zt'l (Rov of Vilna, author of *Achiezer* and *Posek Hador* in his time) considered the shaving machines of his time a "*sofêk isur d'oraysa*" (*Hadras Ponim Zokon*, *Miluyim*, 2:1, p. 715; see there for corroborating testimony from Rav Chaim Ozer's personal barber).

[Similarly, Rav Avrohom Asher Zimmerman zt'l (who served as a Rov in Borough Park and was a prominent Posek in the Yeshiva world) testified in a letter (published in *Hadras Ponim Zokon*, third edition, *Miluyim*, 2:1, p. 717) that when he was in Vilna in 1935-1936 he showed a Schick Shaver to

Rav Chaim Ozer on behalf of Yeshivas Torah Vodaas, and Rav Chaim Ozer would not permit it.]

Hence, it is implausible that Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l would have said what he is quoted as saying in this article in Kuntris Magazine about the "obvious" status of shaving machines in halacha and "cutting challah" – in contradiction to the position of Rav Chaim Ozer zt'l.

[Regarding rumors that Rav Chaim Ozer zt'l permitted the use of shavers, see Halichos Shlomo (Tefilah, 2:7, note 24) where Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l ruled that one cannot rely on that rumor, as well as on any *heter* granted by any Rov for any shaving machine of past generations, since those machines did not cut the facial hair as close to the skin and did not produce as clean of a shave as contemporary shavers do.

See further in Halichos Shlomo there where a letter from Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l to the author of sefer Hadrus Ponim Zokon is quoted, saying: "In my humble opinion, by publishing this sefer you are accomplishing something positive and beneficial. Perhaps through this sefer the issues will be elucidated and clarified, *thereby saving the Jewish public from a severe transgression*".]



☞ "Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin zt'l permitted the use of electric shavers."

Response:

See the sefer Edus L'Yisroel p. 145 where Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin zt'l wrote that although many people rely on halachic leniencies ("heterim") to shave, there are great Rishonim and Achronim who vehemently disagreed and prohibited removing the beard (even) with scissors or depilatory cream ("sam").

Rav Henkin then adds that even according to those who permit removing the beard on halachic grounds, to do so violates the Will of Hashem, who ordained the mitzvah of growing the beard to distinguish Jews from non-Jews. Using any means to shave the beard gives one the appearance of a non-Jew and defeats the Torah's reason for this mitzvah. Although the reasons for mitzvos are not

halachically obligating, Rav Henkin continues, it is not the Ratzon Hatorah (the Will of Hashem in His Torah) to contravene the Divine reason for mitzvos.

Hence, Rav Henkin states, any leniencies regarding shaving are meant only for extraordinarily harsh circumstances ("*shaas hadchak*") and are not for everyone to rely upon under normal circumstances. [This is especially so nowadays, when it is illegal to discriminate in the workplace against a Jew who grows a beard.] Rav Henkin concludes that any heterim to shave are certainly not adequate grounds for b'nei Torah or Rabbonim to remove their beards. Rav Henkin goes on to provide additional halachic reasons why the beard should not be removed with shaving machines or depilatory cream.

It is thus troubling that an article in Kuntris Magazine, whose readership are "b'nei Torah or Rabbonim" not beset with "extraordinarily harsh circumstances" – would mislead its readers into thinking that Rav Henkin zt'l is a source of leniency for shaving their beards (and disregarding Rav Henkin's insistence that they grow beards).



☞ "Rav Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik zt'l said in the name of his grandfather, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik zt'l that...if there is any trace of the hair left then this will not be considered a *hashchasa* of the hair."

Response:

The article intended this statement from Rav Soloveitchik zt'l as a source of leniency, but in reality the contrary is true; this statement demonstrates that all contemporary shaving machines are prohibited, since they all deliver a smooth shave and do not leave a trace of the hair on the face.

Indeed, in an oral conversation, Rav Yitzchok Twersky zt'l, son-in-law of Rav Soloveitchik (and Talner Rebbe of Boston), confirmed that he was told by his father-in-law, Rav Soloveitchik zt'l, that a shaving machine which leaves the face smooth is prohibited.



☞ “In the sefer *Meged Givos Olam* (chelek 1 pg. 94), Rav Michel Shurkin shlit’a explains the heter Rav Moshe Feinstein zt’l used to permit shaving with electric shavers.”

Response:

1) In the most recently published volume of responsa *Shevet HaLevi*, Vol. 11, Yoreh Deah, Section 198, Rav Shmuel Halevi Vosner zt’l wrote:

“With regard to shaving machines...it was agreed by all the Geonim...that there is no difference between [using] them and [using] a razor... The Gaon R. Moshe Feinstein sought to make a distinction between today’s [shaving machines] and a razor and advanced a theory [in justification]... *That theory is not correct and has not been accepted* (אינה נכונה ולא נתקבלה *ayna nechona v’lo niskablah*).”

If so, it is most troubling for an article to be published stating expressly that shaving machines are permitted – based on a heter which Rav Vosner (who *Kuntris Magazine* refers to as the “Posek Hador”) ruled is “*not correct and has not been accepted*” by “*all the Geonim*.”

[It is important to add that Rav Vosner *personally discussed* the halacha of shaving machines with Rav Moshe Feinstein during a face-to-face meeting between these two Gedolim which took place in 1978, during a visit by Rav Vosner to New York (on behalf of Vaad Mishmeres Stam). For further reflections by Rav Vosner regarding this visit with Rav Moshe Feinstein and their exchange regarding shaving machines, see Rav Vosner’s revealing letter dated 9 Nissan, 5738, published in *Hadrus Ponim Zokon*, Miluyim to Section 2, Chapter 1 (p. 729 in the third edition).]

2) There is a universally accepted rule in halacha that “*halacha kebasroy*” – the halacha is in accordance with the latter Poskim (see *Shulchan Aruch*, Choshen Mishpat 25). In the Teves 5776 issue of *Kuntris Magazine* (page 25) appeared the unequivocal Psak Din of the greatest Poskim of our times stating that shaving machines are the halachic equivalent of a razor and that “*using any shaver*

that leaves the face smooth, even if it removes only two hairs, violates the prohibition of ‘Do not destroy the edges of your beard.’” In other words, there is no such thing as a “kosher shaver,” since all contemporary shavers (including those some call “kosher”) leave the face smooth.

The Psak Din explains that this was the opinion of the Chofetz Chaim, the Chazon Ish, the Steipler Gaon and Rav Schach and it was signed by our leading Gedolim, including Rav Elyashiv zt’l (who refused to sign the Psak Din until its wording was changed to indicated a clear prohibition, as is related in the authoritative collection of Rav Elyashiv’s halachic decisions “*Ashrei Ha’ish*” Y.D. p. 143), Rav Aharon L. Steinman shlita, Rav Shmuel Halevi Vosner zt’l, Rav Michel Y. Lefkowitz zt’l, Rav Nissim Karelitz shlita, Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlita, Rav Shmuel Auerbach shlita, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel zt’l and another twenty six (26) of the most prominent Litvishe Roshei Yeshiva of our times. All these Gedolim were aware of Rav Moshe Feinstein’s zt’l position regarding electric shavers – and rejected it.

See also *Teshuvos Minchas Yitzchok* (Vol. 4, Section 113) where the *Minchas Yitzchok*, one of the greatest Poskim of our times, wrote:

“I searched the works of the great Acharonim in the hope of finding a halachic basis to defend the practice to be permissive [to use electric shavers], but not only did I not find a source to be lenient, on the contrary – I found that they all agree to be stringent [and prohibit shaving machines].”

3) Indeed, many Poskim wrote clearly that one may not rely on the *Igros Moshe* regarding shaving machines (including the Steipler Gaon in *Orchos Rabeinu Vol 1*, *Hosafos Chadashos* p. 38.; Rav Elyashiv; the *Debretziner Rov* (author of *Teshuvos Be’er Moshe*), in his letter published in *Hadrus Ponim Zokon* p. 22 (where he writes that he does not believe that Rav Moshe Feinstein zt’l ever issued such a heter); and Rav Moshe Sternbuch (in *Teshuvos V’Hanhagos*, Vol. 5, Section 264).

See also the public letter of Rav Elchonon Halpern zt’l (nossi of His’achdus Kehillas Hachareidim in England), from 15 Kislev 5764, where he wrote:

“Although it has been repeated in the name of one or more Gedolim that there are certain shavers that may be used, this is not true; may the mouths of those who speak falsehood be shut! I therefore request of you to please have mercy upon yourselves and discontinue using any shaver that removes all the hairs of the beard.”

4) As noted later in the article, Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l never committed his heter regarding shaving machines to writing. There are various versions why Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l permitted shaving machines and which machines he permitted. Hence the following question must be asked: Regarding which other Torah prohibition would an observant Jew base his behavior on oral accounts of the opinion of one Gadol (no matter how great he might be) when it is in conflict with the written rulings of the greatest Poskim of our times? This is especially so considering that the prohibition of removing the beard is as severe as (or more severe than) *chilul Shabbos* (as noted above).

5) It is almost three decades since the passing of Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l, and shaving machines have since changed and improved. Accordingly, there is no way of knowing whether or not his heter applies to contemporary shavers, especially since we have no written record of why Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l permitted certain machines. Indeed, Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l's son, Rav Dovid Feinstein shlita, stated that even according to his father's heter, “there is no widely available shaver that can be purchased and used as is” (*The Laws of Pesach: A Digest* by Rav Blumenkrantz zt'l, 5771 edition, p. 421).

6) On the general topic of relying on a renowned halachic authority who rules leniently against the view of the majority, we should make note of the statement of Rav Yisroel Salanter zt'l (in the introduction to *Ohr Hayom B'inyan Bein Hashemashos*, Vilna, 5661). Rav Yisroel Salanter zt'l writes that even if we were to argue that one could elect to act according to the view of a great halachic authority who is lenient “in contrast to all of the other Poskim, because his authority is greater than all of theirs combined” [this was written in reference to the Gra's approach to bein

hashemashos], “one who acts according to that Posek's leniencies must then also adopt his stringencies.” Do all those who shave their beards, relying on Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l's reported heter, also follow all of Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l's numerous *chumros*?



☞ **“Rav Shurkin writes (ibid.) that he heard that the reason why Rav Moshe did not want to write this *teshuva* in *Igros Moshe* is because while it is permitted to shave, the *tzura* of a *Yid* is with a beard.”**

Response:

1) If Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l did not publish his opinion regarding this matter for this reason (because the proper appearance of a Jew is with a beard, and publication of such a heter would encourage people to shave) – then why do people who respect Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l publicize what Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l deliberately did not want publicized?

2) Moreover, if Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l is of the opinion that “the *tzura* of a *Yid* is with a beard” (to the extent that he would not write a *teshuva* stating that shaving is technically permitted, out of concern that it would embolden people to remove their beards) – why doesn't this article (which purports to represent Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l's position) advocate that readers should grow their beards in accordance with Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l's viewpoint?

[This attestation why Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l did not publish his heter regarding shaving machines is also recorded in the popular publication “Daf Yomi Digest,” a daily resource for thousands of Daf Yomi learners worldwide, compiled by the Ruben Shas Kollel and published by Chicago Center for Torah & Chesed, under the leadership of HaRav Yehoshua Eichenstein shlita^a and HaRav Pinchas Eichenstein, Rosh Kollel. In their issue on Nazir daf 40, the following is documented as a clarification of Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l's position:

“It is well known that Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt'l, did permit the use of certain electric shavers. Someone once approached

him and asked why he didn't write a teshuvah outlining the parameters of which shavers are permitted and which are not. 'After all, your teshuvos cover every subject under the sun!' Rav Moshe explained, 'Although I permit this practice halachically, I don't want to write a teshuvah formally permitting this since the proper way is for a Jew to have a beard. Although this is not halachically prohibited, a Jew ought to grow a beard!'"]



☞ **“Some have claimed that the Chofetz Chaim has prohibited the use of electric shavers. They point to the Likutei Halachos where the Chofetz Chaim forbade the use of ‘electric shavers.’ However, as we will see, this does not seem to be accurate..we must conclude that the Chofetz Chaim permitted electric shavers.”**

Response:

1) This assertion – that the Chofetz Chaim in Likutei Halachos is referring to a non-relevant type of shaving machine and is not a source to prohibit today's electric shavers – *flagrantly conflicts the explicit stance of our greatest Gedolim (including those who lived during the time of the Chofetz Chaim and were personally familiar with the shavers used at that time).*

For example:

- Rav Yosef Sholom Elyashiv zt'l, *Posek Hador*, wrote in a teshuva published in his sefer Kovetz Teshuvos (Vol. 1, Section 32) that the electric shavers of today are unquestionably infinitely worse than those that existed in the time of the Chofetz Chaim and were prohibited by him, because modern machines shave much more closely to the skin, and shaving with them is an *“issur Torah mamosh”* – a definite and absolute Torah prohibition.
- Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlita wrote in the name of his father, the Steipler Gaon zt'l: “It has already been publicized that the Chofetz Chaim zt'l in Likutei Halachos on Makkos prohibited even manual (non-electric) shaving machines; how

much more so are today's electric shavers forbidden since they are more advanced.”

• Additionally, Rav Schach zt'l wrote (Michtavim U'Maamarim 3:75):

“To the questioner, may he be well: Concerning shaving the beard with electric shaving machines — see the sefer ‘Likutei Halachos’ on tractate ‘Makos’ (by the ‘Chofetz Chaim’), p. 14b (‘Eyn Mishpot’ op. cit.) where he writes that it is prohibited, and one may not be lenient in this matter. It is also well-known that the ‘Chazon Ish’ zt'l ruled that the use of all shaving machines is forbidden. This is my response, (signed) Elozor Menachem M. Shach.”

• See also Teshuvos Minchas Yitzchok (Vol. 4, Section 113, and again in Vol. 7, Section 63): “Electric shaving machines are much more severe [than the machines forbidden by the Chofetz Chaim], as is well known.”

• Another *Posek Hador*, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l, likewise considered today's shavers incomparably more halachically severe than the machines forbidden by the Chofetz Chaim zt'l, as is recorded in the sefer Halichos Shlomo (Tefilah, 2:7, note 24).

• Similarly, the Debretziner Rov writes in Teshuvos Be'er Moshe (Vol. 7, Kuntres Electric 2:18) that today's shaving machines are “one hundred percent more halachically severe than the machines referred to by the Chofetz Chaim.”

• See also the widely publicized Psak Din (dated Nissan 5768) signed by the greatest halachic authorities of our time (including Rav Elyashiv zt'l, Rav Aharon L. Steinman shlita, Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner zt'l, Rav Michel Y. Lefkowitz zt'l, Rav Nissim Karelitz shlita, Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlita, Rav Shmuel Auerbach shlita, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel zt'l and other Gedolim):

“The severe breach of halacha involved in the use of shaving machines is well known to all. Their use was prohibited by our Rabbis, the Gedolim of the [previous] generation, including the Chofetz Chaim

and the Chazon Ish. Moreover, this [prohibition applied] even to the shavers of many years ago [when the shavers were far more primitive and did not cut hair as close to the skin as modern shavers]. Today, shavers have been enhanced [and cut much closer to the skin] and thus the halachic issues involved are far more severe.”

- Additionally, Rav Dovid Leibowitz zt”l, grand-nephew and student of the Chofetz Chaim zt”l (and founder of the Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim in New York), retracted his heter to use shaving machines after he saw the Chofetz Chaim zt”l’s ruling in Likutei Halachos (as was attested to by his son and successor as Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Henoch Leibowitz zt”l, in his letter of Motzei Shabbos Vayeshev 5752, published in Kuntres Tiferes Odom, p. 23).

- Maran Rav Chaim Kanievsky, shlita, was recently shown a similar attempted distortion of the position of the Chofetz Chaim zt”l regarding the halachic status of shaving machines (published in a footnote by the editor to Teshuvos Gevuros Eliyahu volume 2 note 420). In response, he instructed his son-in-law, Rav Yitzchok Koldetsky, to issue the following clarification, in a letter dated 9 Nissan 5777 :

”מו”ח הגאון שר התורה רבי חיים קניבסקי שליט”א אמר שמרנא החפץ חיים זיע”א אסר להתגלח בכל סוגי המכונות, בלי שום חילוק...ולהשומעים יונעם ורחבא עליהם ברכת טוב.”

“My father-in-law, the gaon and master of Torah, Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky shlit”a, stated that our master the Chofetz Chaim, zy”a, forbade using all types of shaving machines to shave the beard, without any differentiation whatsoever... May those who abide by the above be blessed with good.”

[Parenthetically, there is a factual inaccuracy in the article: The article states that the Chofetz Chaim in Likutei Halachos forbade the use of “electric shavers.” The volume of Likutei Halachos referred to here was published in the year 1900, while the first electric shavers were patented in 1928 and sales began years later. Hence, the Chofetz Chaim could not have been referring to electric shavers.

As noted above, the Chofetz Chaim was referring to a non-electric manual shaver.]

2) To further clarify the position of the Chofetz Chaim zt”l on this issue, it is worth reviewing the testimony of the Chofetz Chaim’s grandson, Rav Gershon Zaks zt”l, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim in Suffern, New York. This testimony is mentioned by Rav Moshe Sternbuch, shlita, in Teshuvos V’Hanhagos, Vol. 5, Section 264, and is quoted verbatim in Hadrus Ponim Zokon, p. 18:

“The approach of my grandfather, the Chofetz Chaim zt”l, was that everyone should grow his beard, as explained at length in Kuntres Tiferes Odom at the conclusion of his text Nidchei Yisrael. In particular, that tzaddik suffered great pain and felt great anguish because of those who used shavers. This refers even to shavers that operate by hand, as existed in his day, which would not trim as close to the flesh as the electric razors used today. In his text Likkutei Halachos to tractate Makkos (ch. 3, Ein Mishpat, sec. 7), he concludes: ‘A person who guards his soul should distance himself very far from this.’ His intent was not that this is a mere stringency, but that it is required by law, applicable to every Jew, without distinction.”



☞ **“It should be noted that the *bachurim* in Radin Yeshiva [the Yeshiva of the Chofetz Chaim] shaved with electric shavers”** (implying that the Chofetz Chaim did not object to this practice).

Response:

1) The same issue of Kuntris Magazine in which this article appeared featured a quotation from “Chidushei HaGranat” by Rav Naftoli Trop zt”l, who served as the Rosh Yeshiva of the Chofetz Chaim’s Yeshiva in Radin from 1903 until his passing in 1928. In the introduction to Chidushei HaGranat published in more recent editions, we find the following account (p. 8, note 21): “The Yeshiva in Radin was founded by the Chofetz

Chaim... Most of the students in Radin (and similarly those of Navardok) *did not shave their beards* due to the objection of the Chofetz Chaim to this practice.”

2) If bachurim in Radin shaved their beards in later years, it was absolutely without the consent and contrary to the position of the Chofetz Chaim, as his son wrote in his biography of the Chofetz Chaim (published in Kol Kisvei Chofetz Chaim):

“Year after year my father admonished [people] regarding shaving the beard, both orally, in writing and in his publications, but hardly anyone listened to him.”

The aforementioned quotation from Rav Gershon Zaks zt'l, the grandson of the Chofetz Chaim zt'l, continues:

“I heard the following story in this regard from my revered father, the gaon, R. Menachem Yosef Zaks, son-in-law of the Chofetz Chaim and the Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim, Radin, which shows the extent the matter caused anguish to the Chofetz Chaim, zt'l.

“In the latter years of the Chofetz Chaim’s life, his hearing was severely compromised. Therefore, his practice was to stand next to the reader’s platform in order to fulfill his obligation to hear the Torah reading. Nevertheless, on several occasions, he suddenly moved away from the platform in the midst of the Torah reading.

“When my revered father asked him the reason for his conduct, the Chofetz Chaim answered that he cannot bear the fact that an aliyah is being given to a person who does not have a beard. Therefore he refrains from hearing the Torah reading, because of his anguish.

“From that time on, my father, zt”l, and my uncle, zt”l, ordained that on the days when the Chofetz Chaim would come to hear the reading of the Torah, an aliyah would not be given to a person who cut his beard.”

3) In fact, the Chofetz Chaim wrote an entire sefer called “Kuntres Tiferes Odom” in which he

vigorously refuted all the justifications used for shaving (e.g., to help find a shidduch, to help find a job, to improve one’s appearance, and so on), and he sharply declared (as well as providing a thorough explanation) that these justifications were against the Torah.

[The Kuntris Magazine article did include a (reduced, difficult-to-read) facsimile of the beginning of the first page of “Kuntres Tiferes Odom,” but did not translate its content. We may assert that the untranslated words in that facsimile provide us with additional information about the position of the Chofetz Chaim regarding shaving the beard. The following are the (translated) words of the Chofetz Chaim himself:

“Especially today when many of the unrestrained elements of our nation shave with a razor, it is a great mitzvah for the entire Jewish people to [counterbalance these acts and] reinforce their own observance, *refraining from trimming the beard even with scissors*. This will demonstrate to all that the commandments the Torah has given us to distinguish a Jewish man [from a non-Jew] are precious to us and we are not ashamed of them, G-d forbid.”]

Moreover, in his sefer Machne Yisroel, a handbook for Jewish soldiers in the Russian army (in which the Chofetz Chaim strove to be as lenient as possible, as explained in the introduction to the sefer), the Chofetz Chaim writes (Chapter 13) that Jewish soldiers should not cut their beards even if they are persecuted or suffer “major” monetary damages as a result. If a soldier cannot withstand the severe torment and persecution, then and only then should he “shorten” (trim) his beard with scissors. If the Chofetz Chaim ruled in this manner for soldiers in the anti Semitic Russian army(!), what justification can anyone have to shave today?!

4) As for the reason why bachurim in Litvishe Yeshivos shaved their beards, see *Visions of the Rov: Highlights from the Life and Times of Moreinu Hagaon Harav Rav Avrohom Kalmanowitz zt'l* (published by the Mirrer Yeshiva), where we find (Chapter 1, p. 28) Rav Kalmanowitz’s testimony in

this matter. Rav Kalmanowitz is quoted there as saying that the reason the bachurim in Slabodka removed their beards was (not for reasons of *yiras Shomayim* that should be emulated, but just the opposite) because “Western influences had infiltrated the Yeshivos of that time, making...beardless faces the norm.” Rav Kalmanowitz therefore refused to shave, and the Roshei Yeshiva and his friends respected him for it.*

* When the bachurim in Slabodka started shaving, the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein zt'l (author of the *Levush Mordechai*), wanted them to keep their beards, but the bachurim did not listen to him (as recorded in *Shaalos U'Teshuvos Pe'as Sodcha*, Section 101).

Furthermore, the Slabodka Rosh Yeshiva wrote very sharply in his introduction to *Levush Mordechai* (on *Bava Kamma*):

“Every Jew should reflect on this [that a raven forsakes his children since they do not appear like him] and have mercy on his children only when they walk in the paths of Hashem, through which they are similar in their appearance to their parents, keeping Shabbos and growing a beard. However, [he should] not [display mercy] to those who are not at all similar in their appearance to the Jewish people, for they have become distant and have garbed themselves in a different style, desecrating Shabbos and disdain the sacred... Their appearance is not similar to the Jewish people, for they have removed from themselves the “Tzelem Elokim” [Divine image, a reference to the beard].”

Regarding the Telz (Telshe) Yeshiva, it is recorded that “when the disease of cutting the beard spread among students of the [Litvishe] Yeshivos, the well-known Gaon, Rabbi Eliezer Gordon [Rov and Rosh Yeshiva of Telz], of blessed memory, adopted the most stringent measures [to stop it]. When he saw that they persisted in their defiance, he mobilized the Gaonim of that time – the venerable Rabbi Y. Dovid Friedman [Rov of Pinsk-Karlin], the venerable Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Meisel [Rov of Lodz, Poland], and the mighty Gaonim Rabbi Chaim HaLevi [Soloveitchik, Rov of Brisk], and Rabbi Chaim Ozer [Grodzenski, Rov of Vilna] – of blessed memory. He demanded that they place a prohibition on Rabbonim against granting [students who cut their beards] Rabbinic ordination [Semicha], on Shochtim against teaching them the skill of ritual slaughtering [Shechita], and on Jewish communities against employing them in any religious position” (*Kovetz Yagdil Torah* 7:5).

[It is important to note that this entire discussion regarding the practice of the Litvishe bachurim in Europe has no relevance to the way most frum people shave today, namely, using an electric shaver, which, in the words of Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlita (cited below), has been prohibited by “all the *Gedolei Hador*.”]

See also the words of Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlita in his *Orchos Yosher* (Chapter 5):

“Throughout our history, it has been a disgrace for anyone not to have a beard. It is only in recent generations that some have started to treat this irreverently, having learned this from the non-Jews... In *Kovetz Igros* (Volume 1, Section 198) of our teacher, the Chazon Ish, he writes [concerning removing the beard with depilatory cream and close-cutting scissors]: *‘Although this sickness has spread even among Torah scholars, may they be well, the issue has not changed as a result, and therefore my soul burns with rage because of this practice’*... [The Chazon Ish] once said that when someone who removes his beard...comes in to see him, he feels so sick that he almost vomits.”



5) The following response by Maran Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman, shlita was recently publicized:

ואומר רבינו: “כי מה שנהגו פעם בישיבות לגלח, כי לא היה ידוע האיסור.”

“The reason it was once common for yeshiva *bochurim* to shave is because the *issur* involved was not widely known.”

פרי חיים ממרן הרב שטיינמן שליט"א, שופר ארגון להפצת יהדות, צוות שופר גנזי המלך, כו תמוז תשע"ב



“In addition, Rav Aharon Kohen, the son-in-law of the Chofetz Chaim, writes in *Chesed L'Avraham* (on the last page of the sefer) that his father-in-law, the Chofetz Chaim shlita (zt'l who was alive at the time) permitted shaving with ‘Machinka’...the Chofetz Chaim...permitted the use of electric shavers for shaving one’s beard, as his son-in-law the great tzadik Rav Aharon Kohen attested to.”

Response:

1) The sefer *Chesed L'Avraham* was published in 1920, long before electric shavers were invented

(electric shavers were first introduced to the market in the 1930s). Thus, this sefer cannot be referring or be a source to permit electric shavers.

2) The instrument referred to in this sefer as a “Machinka” (in parentheses) is defined in the sefer (in Hebrew) as a “Misperes,” a hair-cutting clipper the sefer describes as “Misparayim” (scissors), not a shaver which delivers a smooth shave. In addition, Rav Aharon Kohen references the Chofetz Chaim’s Tiferes Odom and not his Likutei Halachos (where he discusses shaving machines).

3) The article took the quotation from this sefer out of context. The sefer is discussing what Rav Aharon Kohen zt'l told two young men in response to their fathers' concern that they would become estranged from Yiddishkeit upon relocating to America. Rav Aharon Kohen advised them to retain the observance of at least five mitzvos, without which they would be lost to Klal Yisroel. The five mitzvos were the following: keeping Shabbos, Tefillin, Taharas HaMishpacha, shaving and Kashrus.

Are the readers of Kuntris Magazine on the level of these young men who were in danger of being lost to assimilation and required the minimal observance of these mitzvos to remain connected to Hashem?

4) The article also neglected to mention another critical point mentioned in this sefer. Rav Aharon Kohen told these young men that even cutting the beard with scissors is against “daas ruach Chachomim” and the heter to use scissors or depilatory is limited to those who would otherwise shave with a razor. Do the readers of Kuntris Magazine adhere to “daas ruach Chachomim”?!



Hence, what this article in Kuntris Magazine wrote about the position of the Chofetz Chaim zt'l – is in egregious conflict with the testimony of the Chofetz Chaim’s son, two sons-in-law and grandson, as well as that of some of the greatest Gedolei Yisroel of our times (as documented above at length).



Let us conclude with the response of Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlita when he was asked whether any shaving machine can be “kosher” (published in Hadras Ponim Zokon, Miluyim 2:1):

“החזון איש אסר כל מכונה וכ”כ כל גדולי הדור”

“The Chazon Ish prohibited every [shaving] machine. *All the Gedolim of our generation ruled similarly.*”



לע"נ

אדוני אבי היקר באנשים אוהב ואהוב על הבריות
מוכתר במעלות ובמידות תרומיות רודף צדקה וחסד

ר' זאב וואלף ב"ר יצחק ווינער ע"ה

נלב"ע ש"ק פ' יתרו, כ' שבט תשע"ו

תנצב"ה