

Is Having a Beard Theologically Important?



A Detailed Response

to

*a lecture by this title delivered by a distinguished
Talmid Chacham and Professor of Rabbinic Literature*



responded to by

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author of sefer *Hadras Ponim Zokon*

I have immense respect and affection for the esteemed *Talmid Chacham* and Professor of Rabbinic Literature who delivered this lecture, whom I was privileged to have as one of my Rebbes during my formative years and who was a source of supportive encouragement to me. I will always be grateful to him. I enjoy listening to the erudite and dynamic *shiurim* and lectures of this prolific author, popular lecturer and beloved teacher, filled with his captivating and enlightening insights.

The following critically important clarifications will be helpful to avoid practical halachic misimpressions for anyone listening to this lecture delivered on 3/6/2022, entitled: “Is Having a Beard Theologically Important?” In this lecture, the lecturer quotes extensively from a *sefer* called *Masores Moshe*.

The Lecturer’s Assertion: The recording of the lecture implies that the entire *sefer Hadras Ponim Zokon* (hereinafter: HPZ), published by Rabbi Moshe Nisan Wiener (the first 728 page edition of this sefer appeared in 1978; a

fourth, expanded, 1,227 page edition was released in 2022), is based primarily on one word in the Rambam (*Hilchos Avodah Zarah* 12:7), where the Rambam states that one who cuts the beard with scissors is “*patur*” (exempt from punishment). From the fact that the Rambam does not use the word “*mutar*” (permitted — as the Rambam states immediately before and after regarding cutting the *peyos* and mustache with scissors), it is apparently obvious that the change in language is intended to inform us that cutting the beard with scissors is “*patur aval assur*” (exempt from punishment but nevertheless prohibited).

Response: The discussion about this Rambam in *sefer* HPZ occupies 18 out of the 1,250 pages of (the new two-volume, fourth edition of) the *sefer*, beginning on page 78. It is thus not the (sole) foundation of the *sefer*.

The Lecturer’s Assertion: The recording implies that this interpretation of the Rambam (that “*patur*” means “*patur aval assur*”) was

originated by Rabbi Wiener in *sefer* HPZ. Moreover, this thesis of HPZ is baseless since it is in total disregard of the *Kesef Mishnah* (authored by the Beis Yosef, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*) who expressly writes that the intention of the Rambam is “*patur u’mutar*” (i.e., the Rambam really means that cutting the beard with scissors is totally permitted). The recording further asserts that stating that beard removal (other than with a razor) is prohibited contradicts the Gemara and *Shulchan Aruch*, and maintaining a beard is only a Kabbalistic and Chassidic mandate which should not be confused with Halachah.

Response: *Sefer* HPZ did not contrive and originate this interpretation of the Rambam. Rather, *sefer* HPZ quotes no less an authority than the *Sefer HaChinuch* (Mitzvah 252) — a Rishon — who writes explicitly that the Rambam’s intent with the word “*patur*” is that cutting the beard with scissors is “*patur aval assur*.”

Indeed, several sources posit that if the Beis Yosef would have seen that a Rishon such as *Sefer HaChinuch* understood the Rambam in this way, he would not have written otherwise (see: *Teshuvos Tzemach Tzedek*, Y.D., 93, sec. 9-10).

Moreover, many major halachic authorities (certainly no less great than the contemporary authority quoted in the recording) similarly interpreted this Rambam to mean that cutting the beard with scissors is forbidden. They include the Chacham

Tzvi (*Teshuvos Chacham Tzvi, Tosafos Chadashim*, sec. 26), the *Maase Rokeach* (*Makkos* ch. 3), the *Merkeves HaMishnah* (Rambam *Hilchos Avodah Zarah*), the author of the *Chasdei Dovid* (printed with the Tosefta in every standard Gemara) in his *Teshuvos Michtam L’David* (Y.D. sec. 28), and the Rogatchover Gaon in his *sefer* on the Rambam (*Tzafnas Pane’ach, Hilchos Avodah Zarah*), several Sephardic sages (who normally do not disagree with the *Beis Yosef*) such as the Saba Kadisha (see HPZ p. 250), the sources cited by the *S’dei Chemed* (*Klalim, Lamed*, sec. 116), the *Darhei Teshuvah* (Y.D. 181 sec. 2), *Teshuvos Minchas Elazar* (vol. 2, sec. 48), *Teshuvos Kol Mevasser* (vol. 1, sec. 19), and, in our generation, the late non-Chassidic Gadol Hador, Rav Chaim Kanievsky (in his *Orchos Yosher*, ch. 5), where he wrote:

Targum Yonasan states that one who [cuts his beard] *transgresses the prohibition of ‘A man shall not wear a woman’s dress,’* which includes *even cutting the beard using scissors.* *Sefer HaChinuch* states the same, adding that one also transgresses the prohibition of ‘*You shall not follow their [non-Jewish] rules.*’ This is quoted by the Chofetz Chaim in his *Sefer HaMitzvos HaKatzet* (prohibition 177).

[See *sefer* HPZ (p. 78ff.) for many additional sources who cite the Rambam as prohibiting scissors (along with additional Rishonim, not quoted and apparently not seen by the Beis

Yosef, who prohibit non-razor removal of the beard).]

All these Poskim (and many others to be cited below) were not ignorant of “Gemara and *Shulchan Aruch*” and were not “Chassidim.”

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 those who rule that beard removal with scissors is forbidden. 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 שהאריך 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).

Also the renowned Sefardi authority Rav Shlomo Eliezer Alfundari, known as the *Saba Kadisha* (who passed away in 1930 and whose *gadlus* is described in ArtScroll’s *Journey to Jerusalem—The historic meeting of the Minchas Eluzar of Munkacs zt”l to the Saba Kadisha zt”l*) differed with the ruling of the Beis Yosef regarding removing the beard with scissors or depilatory cream, stating bluntly, “Here, the master, erred,” and he would rule that although one is not liable for lashes for removing the beard in such a manner, it is forbidden to do so (as attested in the collection of responsa entitled *Pe’as Sodcha*, responsum 111).

The Lecturer’s Assertion: The recording continues that another foundation the *sefer* HPZ is based on is the statement by the Chofetz Chaim in his *sefer Likkutei Halachos on Makkos* (p. 14b, *Ein Mishpat* op. cit.) where he writes that shaving with the “new machine” to cut the beard appears to

be a transgression of the biblical prohibition against shaving. Therefore, concludes the Chofetz Chaim, “A person who guards his soul should distance himself very much from this [shaving machine].” The recording asserts that it cannot be that the Chofetz Chaim seriously prohibited shaving machines, since he only wrote this statement in a footnote and used the word “appears.”

Response: This assertion flagrantly conflicts the explicit testimony of many major Poskim (including those who lived during the time of the Chofetz Chaim and were personally familiar with the shavers used at that time).

For example:

The Steipler Gaon attested to the fact that the Chofetz Chaim prohibited shaving even with (non-electric) hand clippers (*Orchos Rabbeinu*, vol. 3, p. 105). [At their lowest settings, these clippers do not remove the hair as closely as electric shavers do.]

Rav Yosef Sholom Elyashiv wrote in a *teshuvah* published in his *sefer Kovetz Teshuvos* (vol. 1, sec. 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. This is 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 wrote in the name of his father, the Steipler Gaon:

“It has already been publicized that the Chofetz Chaim in *Likkutei 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 Shach wrote (*Michtavim U’Maamarim* 3:75): “To the questioner, may he be well: Concerning shaving the beard with electric shaving machines—see the *sefer Likkutei Halachos* on tractate *Makkos* (by the Chofetz Chaim), p. 14b (*Ein Mishpat* 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 ruled that the use of all shaving machines is forbidden. This is my response, (signed) Elazar Menachem M. Shach.”

See also *Shaalos u’Teshuvos Minchas Yitzchak* (vol. 4, sec. 113, and again in vol. 7, sec. 63): “Electric shaving machines are much more severe [than the machines forbidden by the Chofetz Chaim], as is well known.”

In a letter dated Parshas Re’eh, 5736, Rav Moshe Heinemann, a foremost disciple of Rav Aharon Kotler, confirmed the accuracy of what is written in *Shaalos u’Teshuvos Minchas Yitzchak*. He added that since the Chofetz Chaim prohibited even the (non-electric) shaving machines of his time, Rav Aharon Kotler was of the opinion that shavers are forbidden to use. Rav Heinemann stated further that his Rebbe, Rav Aharon Kotler, would not issue a *heter* even for

trimmers such as the “Outliner” (which do not remove the beard hair entirely and leave some stubble), out of deference to the Chofetz Chaim.

The Lecturer’s Assertion: It is well-known that the students of the Chofetz Chaim’s own yeshiva in Radin were clean-shaven. They would not have shaved if the Chofetz Chaim seriously considered it prohibited.

Response: Concerning the argument that the Chofetz Chaim’s own students in his yeshiva in Radin shaved, this was utterly against the wishes of the Chofetz Chaim.

Rav Naftoli Trop served as the Rosh Yeshiva of the Chofetz Chaim’s yeshiva in Radin from 1903 until his passing in 1928. In the introduction to *Chiddushei HaGranat* published in more recent editions, we find the following account (p. 8, fn. 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.”

If bochurim in Radin shaved their beards in later years, it was absolutely without the consent and contrary to the position of the Chofetz Chaim, as the Chofetz Chaim’s own son wrote in his biography of his father (published in his introduction to *Michtvevei Chofetz Chaim*, p. 57): “Year after year, my father admonished [people] regarding shaving the beard, both orally, in writing, and in his publications. However, hardly anyone listened to him.”

The extent of the Chofetz Chaim’s vehement objection to shaving is documented further in the following testimony of the Chofetz Chaim’s grandson, Rav Gershon Zaks, founding Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim in Suffern, New York. [This testimony is cited by Rav Moshe Sternbuch in *Teshuvos v’Hanhagos*, vol. 5, sec. 264, and is quoted verbatim in HPZ, p. 18]:

The approach of my grandfather, the Chofetz Chaim, was that everyone should grow his beard, as explained at length in *Kuntres Tiferes Odom* at the conclusion of his *sefer Nidchei Yisroel*. In particular, that *tzaddik* [the Chofetz Chaim] 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* (p. 14b, *Ein Mishpat* op. cit.), he concludes: “A person who guards his soul should distance himself very much from this.” His intent was not that this is a mere stringency, but that it is required by law and is applicable to every Jew without distinction.

I heard the following story in this regard from my revered father, the *gaon* Rav Menachem Yosef Zaks, son-in-law of the Chofetz Chaim and the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim in Radin, which

shows to what extent the matter caused anguish to the Chofetz Chaim. In the later 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 during the Torah reading. When my revered father asked him for the reason for his conduct, the Chofetz Chaim answered that he could not bear the fact that an *aliyah* was being given to a person who did not have a beard. Therefore, he refrained from hearing the Torah reading due to his anguish. From then on, my father and my uncle instructed that on the days when the Chofetz Chaim would come to hear the Torah reading, an *aliyah* would not be given to a person who cut his beard.

The Lecturer's Assertion: The recording states that the fact that the students of the great Litvish yeshivos of pre-WWII Europe were beardless confirms that the Litvish Gedolim considered shaving permissible. If so, the recording continues, the *sefer* HPZ, which halachically discourages shaving, constitutes a disrespectful affront and attack on these yeshiva students who later became the great Torah leaders of Klal Yisroel.

Response: The reality is just the opposite. The *mesorah* (tradition) of Litvish Jewry throughout the centuries

has always been to maintain a full beard. As the Chofetz Chaim testified in his *Kuntres Tiferes Odom* (ch. 1) regarding the beard practice in Litvish communities, until that time (when he published *Kuntres Tiferes Odom* at the turn of the 20th century), only one in a thousand of Litvish Jews shaved.

What prompted the start of beard removal in Litvish circles (and elsewhere)? Rav Chaim Kanievsky testified in his *sefer Orchos Yoshier* (ch. 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 the words of the Chazon Ish (in *Kovetz Igros*, vol. 1, #197) where he writes about beard removal with *sam* (depilatory cream): "I find this matter very painful, for it is against the [Jewish] quality of modesty and is not the Jewish style of dress. ***Rather, [Jews] have learned it from the non-Jews during their exile, thereby negating kedushah.***"

Therefore, when beard removal started in the Litvish Yeshivos, the greatest Litvish Gedolim, including founding Roshei Yeshiva of the greatest Litvish Yeshivos of pre-war Europe, expressed ***categorical opposition to beard removal.***

The Chofetz Chaim wrote an entire treatise called *Kuntres Tiferes Odom* vigorously refuting all the justifications for beard removal. He states there that it is a "Mitzvah

Gedolah” to maintain a full beard and not even trim it with scissors.

Rav Lazer Gordon, Rav and Rosh Yeshiva of Telz, severely admonished his students when they began removing their beards. When their rebellion persisted, he urged Rav Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk and Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski of Vilna to join him in decreeing that any student who removed his beard should not be given *semichah* or hired as a Rov, *shochet*, or *melamed* (*Kovetz Yagdil Torah* 7:5).

Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein, Rosh Yeshiva of Slabodka, known colloquially as the "mother of yeshivas" (who was mentioned in the recording), wrote a scathing rebuke against shaving in the introduction to his *Levush Mordechai* on *Bava Kamma*. When the bochurim in Slabodka started shaving, the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein (author of *Levush Mordechai*), wanted them to keep their beards, but the bochurim did not listen to him (as recorded in *Shaalos u'Teshuvos Pe'as Sadcha*, sec. 101).

The fact that so many of the greatest Litvish Gedolim expressed opposition to shaving should thus not be questioned based on the fact that their students shaved.

WHERE RAV KOOK AND THE CHAZON ISH AGREED

In some ways, Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook (a student of the first and foremost Litvish yeshiva in Volozhin who later served as the first

Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel) and the Litvish Gadol Hador, the Chazon Ish, represented divergent extremes in the spiritual leadership of Orthodox Jewry. Yet, the opposition to shaving by Litvish Gedolim was so extreme and vehement that both Rav Kook and the Chazon Ish shockingly cited the shaving practices of the Slabodka Yeshiva as a cause of the Chevron massacre in 1929. [Regarding Rav Kook, see the 5773 edition of *L'Shloshah B'Elul*, p. 64, from Rav Kook's son and successor, Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook, where he recorded this position of his father. Regarding the Chazon Ish, see the new fourth edition of HPZ, p. 726, where his nephew, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, confirms the accuracy of this account.]

Concerning the general practice of shaving in Litvish yeshivos, the Chazon Ish wrote (in a letter published in *Kovetz Igros*, vol. 1, #197), that “even though this sickness [of beard removal] has spread among the Torah students, that does not make it correct. My soul burns with displeasure from this beard removal practice.”

A few years ago, the Mirrer Yeshiva in Flatbush published a biography of their founding Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Avrohom Kalmanowitz, in which he was quoted as stating that the reason the students in Slabodka shaved was because of the influence of Western society (and that therefore he did not shave when he studied in Slabodka). See *sefer* HPZ for additional quotations

and source references from Litvish Gedolim.

[It is important to note that this entire discussion regarding the practice of the Litvish bochurim in pre-war Europe has no relevance nor is it comparable to the way most from people shave today, namely, using an electric shaver, which, in the words of Rav Chaim Kanievsky (cited below), has been prohibited by “all the Gedolei Hador.”]

LET US LEARN FROM LAKEWOOD

In the recording, the lecturer relates that at one point he studied in the yeshiva of Rav Aharon Kotler in Lakewood (Beth Medrash Govoha). In another recorded lecture, he attested to the fact that he has personal knowledge that Rav Aharon Kotler prohibited shaving machines (and disagreed with the *Igros Moshe*), and that this was common knowledge among his students in Lakewood.

[More recently, Rav Aharon Kotler's grandson, Rav Malkiel Kotler, along with the other Roshei Yeshiva of Lakewood, wrote a public letter (which was posted on the Beth Medrash Govoha bulletin board) attesting that Rav Aharon Kotler considered electric shavers to be prohibited.]

Certainly, all agree that Rav Aharon Kotler was non-Chassidic. No one suspects Rav Aharon Kotler of being ignorant of the sources or of having issued a ruling which contradicts the Gemara and *Shulchan Aruch*. Neither

can he be suspected of being unaware of the shaving practices in the great yeshivos of pre-WWII Europe (where he himself was a Rosh Yeshiva), or of being any less of a Gadol B'Yisroel because he disagreed with the *Igros Moshe* regarding this (and many other halachic issues). The veracity of the fact that Rav Aharon Kotler prohibited shaving machines is not questioned based on the reality that students in Lakewood shaved with electric shavers. Similarly, we should not doubt the opposition to shaving by some of the greatest Litvish Gedolim in Europe just because their students shaved.

The Lecturer's Assertion: The recording states that there is a tradition that the author of the *Mesilas Yesharim*, Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato (the Ramchal), shaved his beard.

Response: The letters of the Ramchal are now published, and we now know that it was only when he was a teenager that he did not have a beard. After his Rebbe rebuked him, he stopped shaving (before turning twenty years of age). [See the sources cited in the fourth edition of HPZ, p. 738.]

The Lecturer's Assertion: The recording states that the Rama, Rav Menachem Azariah of Fano, shaved (and that this account is cited by the Chasam Sofer).

Response: This account has long been proven to be inaccurate. There is an entire chapter in HPZ (sec. 3, part 4) documenting that there is abundant evidence that the Rama had a full beard. More recently, someone challenged Rav

Chaim Kanievsky, stating that this account conflicts what Rav Chaim Kanievsky wrote in his own *sefer*, *Orchos Yosher* (ch. 5), about the halachic status of shaving. In response, Rav Chaim Kanievsky replied (as published in the *sefer Shaalos u'Teshuvos HaGrach, Teshuvos Chadashos*, sec. 398): “Many have repudiated this.”

The Lecturer’s Assertion: The recording makes a blanket statement that all electric shavers are permitted.

Response: The reality is that almost all the greatest Gedolim since the invention of shavers prohibited their use.

See the widely publicized *psak din* (dated Nissan, 5768) signed by the major non-Chassidic halachic authorities of our time (including Rav Elyashiv, Rav Aharon L. Steinman, Rav Shmuel HaLevi Vosner, Rav Michel Y. Lefkowitz, Rav Nissim Karelitz, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, Rav Shmuel Auerbach, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, and another twenty-six Litvish Roshei Yeshiva). The *psak din* quotes the Chofetz Chaim, the Chazon Ish, the Steipler Gaon, and Rav Shach and states that “the severe breach of Halachah 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.”

The Minchas Yitzchak, one of the greatest Poskim of our times, wrote in *Shaalos u'Teshuvos Minchas Yitzchak* (vol. 4, sec. 113): “I searched the works of the great Acharonim in the hope of finding a halachic basis to defend the practice of allowing [the use of electric shavers]. However, 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].”

In the most recently published volume of responsa *Shevet HaLevi* (vol. 11, *Y.D.* sec. 198), Rav Shmuel Halevi Vosner wrote: “With regard to shaving machines...it was agreed by *all the Geonim*...that there is no difference between [using] them and [using] razors....The *gaon* Rav Moshe Feinstein sought to make a distinction between today’s [shaving machines] and razors, and he advanced a theory [in justification]....That theory is not correct and has not been accepted (אינה נכונה ולא נתקבלה), *einah nechonah v’lo niskablah*.”

[It is important to add that Rav Vosner personally discussed the *halachah* 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 Wosner's revealing letter dated 9 Nissan, 5738, published in HPZ (third edition, *miluyim* to sec. 2 ch. 1, p. 729, and fourth edition, pp. 67–68).]

In a published hand-written response to the question as to whether there is such a thing as a “kosher shaver,” Rav Chaim Kanievsky wrote: “The Chazon Ish prohibited all shaving machines, and *all* the Gedolei Hador ruled similarly to prohibit them.”

Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky (who was certainly familiar with Rav Moshe Feinstein's position regarding shaving with electric shavers) wrote in his sefer *Emes l'Yaakov on Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 181)*: “Regarding [the prohibition of using] machines to shave [the beard], this is not just a *chumra* but a substantive halachic issue....In fact, I do not know whether the 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 upon [any] *mesorah* [to be lenient].” As is well known, Rav Moshe Feinstein greatly respected the halachic decisions of Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky. Furthermore, in a letter dated 6 Shevat, 5774, Rav Yaakov's son, Rav Nosson Kamenetzky, wrote: “I hereby attest that my father [Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky] never, ever permitted shaving machines.”

Indeed, many Poskim wrote explicitly that one may not rely on the *Igros Moshe* regarding shaving machines. These Poskim include the Steipler

Gaon (in *Orchos Rabbeinu*, vol. 1, *Hosafos Chadashos*, p. 38; Rav Elyashiv; the Debretziner Rov, author of *Shaalos u'Teshuvos Be'er Moshe* (in his letter published in HPZ, p. 22, where he writes that he does not believe Rav Moshe Feinstein ever issued such a *heter*); and Rav Moshe Sternbuch (in *Teshuvos v'Hanhagos*, vol. 5, sec. 264).

In addition, in the 5778 edition of Agudas Yisroel of America's *Am HaTorah* journal (5:9), Rav Pesach Eliyahu Falk (late Rov in Gateshead and author of responsa *Machzeh Eliyahu* and many other halachic works) testified that he personally heard Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach reject the reported reasoning of Rav Moshe Feinstein to be lenient regarding electric shavers.

Regarding rumors that a great Posek permitted the use of shavers, see *Halichos Shlomo (Tefilah, 2:7, fn. 24)* where Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ruled that one cannot rely on that rumor, nor on any *heter* granted by any Rov for any shaving machine of past generations. He explained that those machines did not cut the facial hair as close to the skin and did not produce nearly as clean a shave as contemporary shavers do. See further in *Halichos Shlomo* (ibid.) where a letter from Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach to the author of the *sefer* HPZ is quoted, stating: “In my humble opinion, by publishing this *sefer* you are accomplishing something good and beneficial. Perhaps this will elucidate and clarify the relevant issues, *thereby saving*

many Jewish people from a severe transgression.”

The Lecturer’s Assertion: It was stated in the recording that Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank permitted electric shavers.

Response: This is not accurate. In a letter (printed in *Shaalos u’Teshuvos Chelkas Yaakov*, vol. 3, sec. 39), Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank wrote regarding electric shavers that “since those who shaved using them emerged clean, with completely smooth skin on which there were no remnants [of hair], this type of shaving is equivalent to using a razor.”

Hence, according to Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank, all modern shavers are prohibited (since “those who shave using them emerge clean, with completely smooth skin”).

See also the letter from Machon HaRav Frank published in the *miluyim* to HPZ (sec. 2, ch. 1) where Rav Shabsi Rosenthal, head of the Machon and one of Rav Frank’s closest confidants, attests that he is a witness to the fact that Rav Frank only permitted electric shavers which left over some length of hair. Rav Rosenthal continues that *the teshuvah in Har Tzvi was published before the more modern shavers became available*. Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank’s recommendation to refrain from pressing when shaving (in order to avoid a close shave) only further demonstrates that he was of the opinion that a shaver which produces a close shave is prohibited. (In addition, this recommendation was widely rejected by Poskim — see HPZ, pp. 376ff.)

The Lecturer’s Assertion: The recording praises the decision of the rabbinical advisor of a Lakewood magazine to reject a paid advertisement which consisted of a translation of Rav Chaim Kanievsky’s manifesto in which he quotes great luminaries who prohibited shaving the beard, including the Chofetz Chaim, the Chazon Ish, the Steipler Gaon, Rav Shach, and others.

Response: It is concerning that this rabbi rejected a halachic statement issued by the very same Gedolim whose opinions regarding other issues are regarded with the greatest respect and reverence by the Lakewood community. (This is especially concerning since their own founding Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Aharon Kotler, also prohibited shaving machines, as attested to by the lecturer as well as the current Roshei Yeshiva of BMG in Lakewood, as noted earlier.)

The Lecturer’s Assertion: The recording states that the Rav, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchok Elchonon (RIETS) and grandson of Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, permitted electric shavers, as did the Igros Moshe.

Response: *Sefer Meged Givos Olam* by Rav Michel Shurkin (who was close with both the Rav and the *Igros Moshe*) discusses (vol. 1, p. 95) the opinion of Rav Soloveitchik concerning shaving machines. Rav Soloveitchik is cited there as quoting his grandfather Rav Chaim who opined that unless tangible stubble is left after beard shaving, the

prohibition of *hashchasah* applies. Accordingly, any shaver that produces a clean shave is prohibited.

Similarly, in an article titled “Why Electric Shavers Are Permitted” (in the Teves/December 2015 issue of *The Kuntris Torah Magazine*), it states that “Rav Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik said in the name of his grandfather, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik that...if there is any trace of the hair left then this will not be considered a hashchasa of the hair.” The article intended to quote this statement from Rav Soloveitchik 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, son-in-law of Rav Soloveitchik (and Talner Rebbe of Boston), confirmed to Rav Shlomo Frankel (Rov of the Shevas Achim shul in Flatbush) that he was told by his father-in-law, Rav Soloveitchik, that a shaving machine which leaves the face smooth is prohibited. Rav Yitzchok Twersky asked Rav Soloveitchik this question and conveyed Rav Soloveitchik’s response immediately while he was on the phone with Rav Frankel. The fact that both Rav Shurkin and Rav Frankel independently heard the same response from Rav Soloveitchik confirms the accuracy of this report.

This does not contradict the lecturer’s account of Rav Soloveitchik inspecting

a shaving machine, since such an inspection only helps to determine whether the machine operates using scissor-like or razor-like cutting mechanisms, and it does not demonstrate how close a shave it produces. As noted, in the 1950s, when the lecturer showed his shaver to the Rav, shaving machines did not produce as close a shave as today’s electric shavers.

Regarding the Igros Moshe, it is over three decades since the passing of Rav Moshe Feinstein, and shaving machines have since changed and improved. Accordingly, there is no way of knowing with certainty whether his reported *heter* applies to contemporary shavers, especially since we have no written record of why Rav Moshe Feinstein permitted certain machines. Indeed, Rav Moshe Feinstein’s son, Rav Dovid Feinstein, 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, 5771 edition, p. 421). Similarly, *Yated Ne’eman* (Hebrew, 5769, issue 10) quotes Rav Moshe Feinstein’s son Rav Reuven Feinstein as saying that currently there are no shavers which would meet his father’s requirements for a *heter*.

It is also apparent from *Igros Moshe E.H. 2:12* that the shaving machines Rav Moshe Feinstein was familiar with did not produce a close shave, since he writes there that it is obvious to

onlookers whether one shaved with a razor or with a shaving machine. Contemporary shavers, in contrast, shave as close as a razor and it is not obvious to onlookers whether a razor or shaver was used.

Rav Moshe Feinstein never committed his *heter* regarding shaving machines to writing. There are various versions as to why Rav Moshe Feinstein 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 (and contradictory) accounts of the opinion of one Gadol (no matter how great he might be) when it conflicts with the written rulings of the greatest Poskim of our times?

Furthermore, there is a universally accepted rule in Halachah that *halachah kebasro'i*, the Halachah is in accordance with the latter Poskim (see *Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat* 25). It was previously documented that the major Poskim (both before and) *after* the *Igros Moshe* ruled that shaving machines are the halachic equivalent of a razor, and that “using any shaver that leaves the face smooth, even if it was used to remove only two hairs, violates the prohibition of ‘Do not destroy the edges of your beard’” (quote from the *psak din* mentioned above dated Nissan, 5768).

In other words, there is no such thing as a “kosher shaver,” since all contem-

porary shavers (including those some call “kosher”) leave the face smooth.

See also *Meged Givos Olam* (vol. 1, p. 96) where Rav Shurkin writes that he heard that the reason Rav Moshe did not want to write this *teshuvah* permitting shaving machines in *Igros Moshe* is because while (according to the *Igros Moshe*) it is technically permitted to shave, “the *tzurah* of a Yid is with a beard.”

If Rav Moshe Feinstein 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 publicize what Rav Moshe Feinstein deliberately did not want publicized?

Moreover, if Rav Moshe Feinstein is of the opinion that “the *tzurah* of a Yid is with a beard” (to the extent that he would not write a *teshuvah* stating that shaving is technically permitted, out of concern that it would embolden people to remove their beards), why don't those who purport to represent Rav Moshe Feinstein's position advocate that listeners grow their beards, in accordance with Rav Moshe Feinstein's viewpoint?

[For a much more comprehensive response to the reported leniency of the *Igros Moshe* regarding electric shavers, see at length *Authoritative Responses to Common Misconceptions* (available on Amazon), ch. 12. Additionally, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, non-Chassidic Gadol Hador,

endorsed this writer's response to the *heter* of the Igros Moshe with the words "Yafeh kasavta, you have written well." It is published (along with a facsimile of Rav Chaim Kanievsky's handwritten endorsement) in the *Ohr Yisroel* (Monsey) Torah journal (vol. 68, p. 382).]

EPILOGUE

For decades, the foremost, preeminent (non-Chassidic, Litvish) Posek in America was Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin (who passed away in 1973). Rav Elyashiv referred to Rav Henkin as the "Mara d'Asra of America" (see *Yeshurun*, vol. 20, pp. 153f.). Rav Henkin studied at the Litvish Sutzker Yeshiva under Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer. He received *smichah* from Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer, Rav Yaakov Dovid Wilovsky (the Ridvaz), Rav Boruch Ber Leibowitz (Rosh Yeshivas Kaminetz), and Rav Yechezkel Michel Epstein (the Aruch HaShulchan).

It is well known that Rav Moshe Feinstein had immense respect and deference for Rav Henkin.

Yet Rav Henkin, in his *sefer Edus l'Yisroel* (p. 145), wrote that although many people rely on halachic leniencies (*heterim*) to shave, there are Rishonim and Acharonim who vehemently disagreed and prohibited removing the beard (even) with scissors or depilatory cream (*sam*). These Rishonim and Acharonim are of the opinion that although any method of beard removal not involving a razor is exempt from punishment, *it is*

nonetheless prohibited—just as documented at length in *sefer* HPZ.

In Rav Henkin's words:

יש מהראשונים הסוברים שדין השחתה וגילוח נאמר רק לענין חיוב, אבל איסור יש אף בהשחתה לבד.

The Gemara and *Shulchan Aruch* stipulate that one is only liable for cutting the beard if he both cuts it (*giluach*) and removes it entirely (*hashchasah*)...However, there are Rishonim who hold that this stipulation is only necessary with regard to being liable. It is prohibited to cut the beard even if one employs only *hashchasah* [such as depilatory cream, or only *giluach*, such as scissors or shaving machines].

Rav Henkin then adds that even if a leniency can be found for removing the beard on halachic grounds, to do so *violates the Will of Hashem*. It is not the *ratzon haTorah* (the will of Hashem in His Torah) to contravene the Divine reason for *mitzvos* ("אין זה עם רצון התורה אם הוא עובר על הטעם").

Rav Henkin continues and declares that therefore, any leniencies regarding shaving are meant only for extraordinarily harsh circumstances (*shaas hadchack*), and they are not for everyone to rely on under normal circumstances (והדין שהוא בניגוד להטעם) ("הוא רק פתח הצלה בשעת הדחק"). [The concept of *shaas hadchak* is even less relevant nowadays, when it is illegal to discriminate in the workplace against a Jew who grows a beard.]

Rav Henkin concludes that **for b'nei Torah, and especially for Rabbonim, any heterim to shave with a scissors-like device or to remove the beard with depilatory cream are certainly not adequate** (“לבני התורה ובפרט לרבנים אין היתר” (זה מספיק). [The lecturers on the forum where this lecture was recorded as well as its listeners are “b'nei Torah” or “Rabbonim” not beset with “extraordinarily harsh circumstances.”]

[Rav Henkin goes on to provide additional halachic reasons why the beard should not be removed with shaving machines or depilatory cream.]

Apparently, according to Rav Henkin, the position that beard removal with scissors is “*patur aval assur*” (“אבל איסור” (יש אף בהשחתה לבד) does not represent ignorance of Gemara and *Shulchan Aruch*.

It is not a “Chassidic” interpretation.

Evidently, Rav Henkin was of the opinion that publishing a *sefer* discouraging beard removal due to halachic considerations is not “a detestable disparagement of the students of the great Litvish yeshivos of pre-war Europe.”

Additionally, we have no evidence that a Gadol Hador objected to Rav Henkin’s publishing his *sefer* due to these halachic declarations.

Similarly, no one accuses Rav Chaim Kanievsky of being guilty of an affront to the students of the great Litvish Yeshivos. No one suggests that his *sefer Orchos Yosher* should not be published because he cites (in ch. 5)

opinions that halachically prohibit beard removal (even) with scissors and depilatory cream, or for declaring:

ובכל הדורות ה' זה בזיון גדול מי שלא ה' זקן, ורק בדורות האחרונים התחילו לזלזל בזה כי למדו מהגויים.

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 matter irreverently, having learned this from the non-Jews.”

Apparently, the forty (40) Gedolei Torah who wrote letters endorsing and supporting *sefer Hadras Ponim Zokon* did not share these concerns either. They include Rav Dovid Lifshitz, distinguished Rosh Yeshiva in Yeshiva University’s Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchok Elchonon (RIETS) for almost fifty years, who wrote an enthusiastic approbation, including these words:

ספרו הנכבד שיצא לפני זמן קצר לאור עולם בשם הדרת פנים זקן ונתקבל באהבה וברצון רב לפני יודעי דת ודין משום שיש בו בנין שלם מסודר לתפארה לגדור גדר ולעמוד בפרץ בדבר רבוי המכשלה בענין גילוח והשחתת הזקן ...ואפריון נמטי' לרומעכ"ת שתוך יגיעה רבה והתמסרות נפשית זכה לברר וללבן בטוב טעם ודעת שיטות רבותינו הראשונים והאחרונים הפוסקים ז"ל וגם הצליח לרכז ולאסוף כעמיר גורנה דבריהם בהילכתא גבירתא זו והוסיף נופך משלו ...והיות שחפץ ה' בידו הצליח ... הנני לעודד פעלו זה בקדש ולברכו שיצליח במלאכתו מלאכת שמים לחזק כל בדק ולזכות הרבים ולהוסיף הוד והדר ויקר תפארת בקדושת ישראל ונזכה כולנו במהרה להרמת קרן התורה ולתשועת עולמים.

Your prestigious *sefer* titled *Hadras Ponim Zokon* was recently published and was accepted with much acclaim by all those involved in Halachah. The *sefer* consists of a superbly arranged edifice to repair the widespread breach regarding shaving the beard.

...With great toil and self-sacrifice, you have merited to clarify the opinions of the halachic codifiers among the Rishonim and Acharonim. You have also

succeeded in gathering their words pertaining to this significant topic, adding your own insights as well.

...I encourage this sacred endeavor and bless you with success in your work to repair this breach. May you enable many people to do meritorious deeds, and may you add beauty and glory to the sanctity of Bnei Yisroel. May we all speedily merit to see the rise of the glory of Torah and the everlasting deliverance of Moshiach.

