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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

On the Air with Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner

Rav Aviner answers questions of Jewish Law and faith on the radio in Israel on Tuesday & Thursday nights (To listen: www.kimizion.org/shiur/shut.html). On the Air presents a sample each week.

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A mourner preparing for Shabbat

Q: When should a mourner who is sitting shiva begin to prepare for Shabbat?

A: One should prepare for Shabbat approximately one hour before Shabbat. He can change his clothes and wash up a little. It is true that it is forbidden for a mourner to wash, but it is permissible if he is dirty or sweaty. While our Sages prohibited pleasure washing, they permitted removing a distressing situation. The source for this idea is in the Mishnah in Berachot (2:6) which says that Rabban Gamliel bathed when he was a mourner. His students said: Didn't you teach us that it is forbidden for a mourner to bathe? Rabban Gamliel responded: I am an "istinis," i.e. I am punctilious about keeping clean and I will suffer terribly if I do not bathe. I am not washing for pleasure, but to remove a distress. Today, everyone is considered an "istinis." Everyone bathes almost each day, and some people even bathe twice a day – in the morning and evening. It is therefore permissible to take a shower, but obviously it should be done quickly and in lukewarm water. The same applies to clothing. On Shabbat a mourner wears outer clothing which is clean, but does not change his undergarments, since dirty outer clothing would be mourning publicly.

Again, nowadays people change their undergarments daily and if they do not they will suffer greatly. Therefore, one should take clean undergarments and dirty them a little by drying the bathroom sink, etc... in order to remove the pleasant feeling of clean clothing.

Shabbat candlesticks at different heights

Q: Is there a problem to have Shabbat candlesticks which are at different heights?

A: No, there is no problem. There is a discussion regarding Chanukah that the candles must be at the same height in order to ensure that it is clear which night of Chanukah is being celebrated. On Shabbat, however, the candles are to provide light and it is not important if they are at different heights. It is therefore permissible to have Shabbat candlesticks with different artistic styles and at different heights.

Charging a cell phone during Shabbat

Q: Is it permissible to put a cell phone in its charger before Shabbat and charge the cell phone over Shabbat?

A: It is permissible to have electricity run for us during Shabbat. The one who forbids this is Beit Shammai. There is a dispute in the Mishnah in Shabbat (1:5-9) between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai. It is forbidden for me to work on Shabbat and it is forbidden for my animals to work on Shabbat, but what about my possessions? Beit Shammai says that it is forbidden and Beit Hillel says that it is permissible. We hold like Beit Hillel. Therefore, as long as they are activated before Shabbat begins, the electricity can work on Shabbat, the oven can work on Shabbat, a fan can run on Shabbat, the cholent can heat up during Shabbat and the cell phone can charge up on Shabbat.

Telephone book on Shabbat

Q: Is it permissible to look in a telephone book on Shabbat in order to check an address or is the phone book muktzeh?

A: It is not muktzeh, since it is a book and no forbidden labor is done with this book. Although one may argue that a person places this book on the side and he does not intend to use it, this is not in fact true. It is a book like all others and a person occasionally wants to look something up in the telephone book on Shabbat.