YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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# THE LAWS OF SHABBAT

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Shiur #32:

*Choresh*, Part III

IV) Washing the Floor

The Gemara (151b) indicates that it is forbidden to wash a tiled floor or pour oil on it:

It once happened that a student of Rabbi Meir entered the bathhouse. He wanted to wash the floor, but he said to him: “We do not wash it.” To oil the floor — he said to him: “We do not oil it; ground can be confused with ground.”

In other words, washing and oiling a floor which is not tiled is forbidden because of filling holes (Rashi),[[1]](#footnote-1) and therefore the Sages forbid washing and oiling tiled floors, because one may confuse them and come to wash or oil an unpaved floor.

The Rambam (21:3) and the Shulchan Arukh (337:3) rule accordingly:

“One may neither oil the ground nor wash it, even if it is tiled.”

Why are we stringent when it comes to washing tiled floors, while the Rambam and the Shulchan Arukh themselves are lenient when it comes to sweeping them, as we saw in our previous *shiur*? The Maggid Mishneh (ad loc.) explains that washing the floor is not as necessary an act as sweeping, and therefore the Sages are more prepared to ban it:

One may not oil… or wash the floor… Even though sweeping is allowed on tiles, this matter is forbidden; they decreed against it, as there is not as great a need as there is for sweeping.

The Mishna Berura (17) writes to this effect as well.

**When All the Houses are Tiled**

What is the rule when all of the houses in town are tiled? The halakha here depends apparently on the dispute among the *Rishonim* which we saw in our previous *shiur*. According to Rashi and Tosafot, the Sages only banned sweeping hard floors because of dirt floors in the same locale, but if all of the houses in the town are tiled, there is no reason to ban this. According to the Ramban, on the other hand, there is no difference between one place and another. The Sages did not always decree against tiled floors, but in an area in which they did decide to make a decree — e.g., washing the floors — this decree is relevant even in a place in which all of the houses have tiled floors. This is also what the Rambam (21:3) indicates, as he writes simply that oiling or washing the ground is forbidden even if it paved, and he does not distinguish between different locales.

In practice, the Bei’ur Halakha, as we have mentioned, endorses the lenient view when it comes to sweeping the house in a town in which most of the houses have tiled floors; however when it comes to washing the floor, he gives no hint that he is prepared to be lenient about it. It is possible to explain this simply: sweeping the house is allowed by the Rambam upon any tiled ground (and the Ramban would say the same about a dirt floor), and the reason we are stringent is in accordance with the view of Tosafot, who compare the prohibition of sweeping to the one against dragging heavy objects; consequently, we should not be more stringent than Tosafot themselves, who are lenient in a locale in which all of the houses have hard floors. When it comes to washing the floor, on the other hand, the prohibition upon tiled ground is stated explicitly in the Gemara, and therefore it is more difficult to be lenient in a dispute among *Rishonim* and to allow washing the floor, even in a locale in which all of the houses have hard floors.

In fact, the Ketzot Ha-shulchan (146; *Baddei Ha-shulchan*, 59) is inclined to allow washing the floor in a locale in which all of the houses have tiled floors; nevertheless, Rav Neuwirth writes (*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilkhata* 23:6) that one should be stringent about this, and this is the view of most *Acharonim*.

**Leniencies for Washing Floors**

However, Rav Neuwirth adds (ibid.) that in extreme cases, e.g., in hospitals, in which one must be very strict about hygiene and cleanliness, one may be lenient about washing the floor on Shabbat. (Apparently, the same would apply in an army dining hall when there is a great deal of dirt on the floor: hygienic concerns should make it permissible to be lenient about this.)

One may not wash the floor even if it is tiled, neither with a rag nor with a squeegee… However, in extreme cases — for example, in hospitals, in which hygiene is particularly important — one may be lenient and permit washing the tiled floor, as long as one will use a squeegee alone.

In a note, he cites the justification:

See the **Mishna Berura** (ibid.), that sweeping is more important than washing, and therefore it is allowed upon tiles; if so, one may say that, in cases of extreme need, the rule of washing is like the rule of sweeping, particularly in a place where there are individuals in ill health.

In other words, we are lenient when it comes to sweeping a tiled floor, and the reason for being stringent about washing is that it is not as urgent as sweeping, as we saw in the abovementioned words of the Maggid Mishneh. Therefore, in a place in which the washing is particularly necessary, it is possible to be as lenient about it as we are about sweeping. We should add that one may enlist the view of Rashi and Tosafot that one should not forbid washing a tiled floor in a locale in which all the floors are tiled.

When there is a danger that someone will slip and fall, it is certainly permissible to wash the floor, since the prohibition is only rabbinic in nature, and in a place in which there is a concern of personal injury, the Sages did not make their decrees (Gemara 42a, Shulchan Arukh OC 334:27).

Naturally, in any case in which we are lenient about washing floors, the intent is only to allow moving water about with a squeegee, **not using a rag,** because this raises problems of squeezing and laundering (Mishna Berura 337:17).

Rav S.Z. Auerbach (*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilkhata* 23:7, n. 27) is cited to the effect that in a case in which **water has been spilled on the floor**, one may mop the water and remove it using a squeegee. According to him, the prohibition of washing the floor is applicable only when water is put on the floor in order to wash it, not when one is removing water which has been spilled.

Rav Auerbach adds (ibid.) that one may even be permitted to spill water on a dirty spot and then remove the water with a squeegee, because cleaning one spot in this manner is not included in the ban. This is also the ruling of the Or le-Tziyon (Vol. II, Ch. 43, n. 8) and the Yalkut Yosef (Vol. V, p. 65).

**Summary**

In conclusion, **one may not wash a floor, whether its surface is made of dirt or tiles.** Even in our times, when all of the houses have tiled floors, one should still be stringent about this. Nevertheless, one may be lenient in certain cases, as long as one uses a squeegee without a cloth:

1. If there is a case of great need, e.g., in hospitals or in a place in which a spilled substance seriously threatens hygiene or the honor of Shabbat, one may be lenient and wash the floor (with a squeegee).
2. When there is a need (even not as great as in #1), one may spill water on the ground and after that mop it with a squeegee.
3. If water spills on its own, it may be removed in any case.

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V) Playing with Marbles

In the Gemara in *Eruvin* (104a), the Sages argue about the prohibition of making loud noise on Shabbat: does this include all noisemaking (Ulla) or only “a musical sound” (Rabba), i.e., producing a sound which is pleasant to the ear? The Gemara there notes a prohibition to play with walnuts on Shabbat:

Rav Yehuda says in the name of Rav: “It is forbidden for women to play with walnuts.”

What is the reason? Is it not because one produces a sound, and it is forbidden to produce any sound?

No, it is lest one come to fill holes. Were you not to say so, what would you say about what Rav Yehuda said, “It is forbidden for woman to play with apples” — what sound is produced there? Rather, it is lest one come to fill holes.

The Gemara considers the possibility that the prohibition is based on the fact that it is forbidden to produce sounds on Shabbat, and it brings proof to the view of Ulla that every production of sound is forbidden. However, the Gemara rejects the proof: it may be that only “a musical sound” is forbidden, following the view of Rabba, and the walnut game is forbidden because of a different reason — one may come to smooth out the ground and fill depressions in it. This stands to reason, given that playing with apples is also forbidden, even though one makes no inappropriate noise while playing it.

According to Rabbeinu Yerucham (12:7), there is a difference between the two approaches when it comes to the question of whether may play the walnut game on top of a mat, upon which filling holes is not applicable:

When it comes to playing with walnuts or almonds on Shabbat, for those who rule in accordance with Ulla, it is forbidden even on a mat; for those who rule in accordance with Rabba, this is allowed on a mat, because there is no filling of holes.

In practice, we rule in accordance with the view of Rabba, as there is no prohibition of producing a sound unless it is “a musical sound” (*Shulchan Arukh* OC 338:1). As such, the Shulchan Arukh and Rema (338:5) rule that the prohibition to play with walnuts is based solely on the concern of filling holes, which does not exist in a place in which there is no issue of smoothing out the ground:

One may not play with walnuts or apples and the like, because one may fill holes.

Gloss [Rema]: This is only upon the ground, but on top of a table it is allowed, as there is no need to ban it because of holes.

May one play on top of **tiled ground?** This depends apparently on the dispute of the *Rishonim* which we have seen: does one apply a ban to paved ground even if the Gemara does not explicitly say so, as is the case with sweeping the house? According to this, just as the Rema rules stringently concerning sweeping a tiled floor, the same should apply to a game of marbles on a hard floor. This is how the Mishna Berura (ad loc., 20; *Shaar Ha-tziyun*, 23) rules, and he adds that this is implied by the Rema: the allowance is limited to the table, but it would not apply to the floor.

What is the rule in our time, **when all of the houses have tiled floors**? May one play marbles on a hard floor? Apparently, one should be lenient about this, as the Bei’ur Halakha is lenient concerning sweeping the house, and this is what Rav Neuwirth writes (*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilkhata* 16:5). However, there is good reason to be more stringent about a game of marbles, as the Ketzot Ha-shulchan writes (*Baddei Ha-shulchan* 146:60, end):

This applies only to sweeping, because one does not sweep the courtyard and the alley on Shabbat, only the house; therefore, since all of the houses have tiled floors, it is allowed. However, a game of walnuts is played also in the courtyard or the alley, and they are not tiled; therefore, it is forbidden even in houses with tiled floors.

In other words, sweeping is done specifically inside the house. Therefore, as the entire reason to forbid sweeping a tiled house is a concern that one may come to sweep **a dirt floor,** in a place in which there is practically no house such as this, there is no reason for the ban. However, a game of walnuts and the like is played outside as well, not only inside, and therefore one should prohibit doing so even in a house with tiled floors, lest one come to play **outside in an unpaved area.** Thus, it makes no difference whether the houses in the town have tiled floors or dirt floors, because the concern has nothing to do with houses. The Shevitat Ha-shabbat (*Choresh* 28) also writes to this effect.

According to this, the halakha varies from game to game. A game which is always played upon a hard floor may be played on Shabbat on the floor of the house. A game which is played inside the house as well as outside the house, on the ground, should not be played on the floor on Shabbat, following the stringent view. When it comes to **marbles**, in the past it was very common to play with them outside, and therefore it was appropriate to be stringent even inside the house and confine it to the table, but in places in which we are accustomed nowadays to play only inside the house, there is good reason to be lenient.

**Summary**

In conclusion, the Sages banned playing games with walnuts and the like which require smooth ground, lest one come to fill in holes while playing the game. Today, one may be lenient about games which are always played on a hard floor and play them on the floor of the house on Shabbat, but not outside (not even on pavement).

Translated by Rav Yoseif Bloch

1. The Mishna Berura (337:16) explains that even the *Rishonim* who believe that sweeping the ground should not be forbidden because of filling holes concede apparently that washing it should be forbidden, since in cleaning one is more interested in improving the ground than one is in sweeping; therefore, there is a greater concern that one may fill in holes intentionally. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)