



INTERVENING SUBSTANCES

“And he shall immerse his whole body—in the water.”
From the redundancy ‘in the water’ it is derived that nothing should come
between his body and the water.
 —Sukkah 6:a



BACKGROUND

The previous chapter dealt with *hafifab*; the wife’s preparation for immersion. This chapter deals with intervening substances found on the body or hair *after* immersion.

A substance is considered to be intervening, from the Torah’s standpoint, when it covers the majority of the body¹ and the woman is particular² in not allowing such a substance to remain on her body.

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- 1 Even if it doesn’t cover the majority of the body in one place, but rather its combined surface areas does. See *Mehaber* 198:5. The hair is viewed as an independent body when considering if a substance covers its majority. Some say this refers to each hairy area. Some say this rule refers only to the hair on the head.
- 2 Even if other women are not particular, *Beis Yosef* 198, *Tur*, *Taz* and *Shach* 198:2. Or most women are particular, even if she is not, *Mehaber* 198:1.

The Talmudic Rabbis³ ruled that a substance on the body invalidates the immersion, even if it fulfills only one of these conditions⁴. This stringency was designed to act as a fence guarding against immersion when both conditions are present.

Subsequently, it was ruled⁵ that all items should be removed before immersion, even if they are very small, loose fitting, and one is not particular about their presence⁶. These, however, do not invalidate the immersion after the fact. Furthermore, when their removal is impossible, very painful, or particularly complicated, immersion is nonetheless permitted⁷, in consultation with an orthodox Rabbi expert in these laws.

It is of great importance that the woman wash and examine her body thoroughly before immersing in the *mikveh* to ensure that there are no intervening substances.

Note that no intervening substance (*batzitza*) whatsoever should be allowed, and this is the purpose of the preparation for the immersion (see Chapter Seven).

Therefore, situations described on the following pages where we note that immersion is not invalidated, refer to those discovered after the fact, i.e. after immersion.

In the following pages we will delineate situations and substances which constitute a problem of *batzitza*.

HAIR

KNOTS . Two hairs which remained knotted, whether together or to two separate hairs⁸ do not invalidate the immersion.

One knotted hair, whether around itself or another hair invalidates the immersion, if *she* is usually particular in ensuring that not even one hair remains knotted⁹.

However, if she is *not* normally so cautious, this one knotted hair does not invalidate her immersion. In other words, the law depends on her *personal* fastidiousness, even if most others

3 *Eruvim* 4:b, *Sukkab* 6:b.

4 Even after the fact, *Bodei Hasbulchan* 198:5.

5 *Ramo* 188:1. This is considered a latter stringency, not of the Talmudic era, *Sidrei Tabara* 198:1.

6 *Ramo* 188:1.

7 *Bodei Hasbulchan* 198:15. In consultation with an orthodox Rabbi expert in these laws.

8 *Mehaber* and *Ramo* 198:5. Since there are *two* hairs, the knot cannot be too tight as to stop water from entering.

9 *Mehaber* 198:5.

aren't particular about one knotted hair, if *sbe* is, it invalidates the immersion¹⁰.

Perspiration causing most of the hair on her head or under her armpits to cling together invalidates the immersion¹¹. Less than half does not invalidate the immersion, unless she is particular about this. Perspiration causing even less than half of her pubic hair to cling together invalidates her immersion¹².

LICE . As explained in the previous chapter, a woman should do whatever possible to remove lice or lice eggs from her scalp and hair including combing with a fine comb designed for this purpose, rinsing with hot water and pulling them out with her fingernails¹³.

If she was negligent and did not try to remove them, her immersion is invalid¹⁴.

HAIR DYES . Hair dye which is absorbed into the hair shaft does not invalidate the immersion¹⁵.

However, if the dye has already been ruined to the degree that it is undesirable or will become ruined and undesirable because of the *bajifah*, it constitutes an intervening substance and invalidates the immersion¹⁶.

Ideally, she should either completely remove it or redye it. If the time of immersion has arrived and this is not possible or involves tremendous difficulty, she is permitted to immerse¹⁷.

CUTTING . The hair, when clean and unknotted, does not adversely affect immersion¹⁸ and

10 *Mebaber* 198:5, *Darbei Tesbuva* 198:19.

11 *Mebaber* 198:6, according to *Sidrei Tabara* this refers to a case where it is *not* the majority. *Poskim*.

12 *Mebaber* 198:6, *Taz* 198:10. "Less than half," *Tabara Kealachba* 20:15.

13 *Mebaber* 198:47.

14 *Shach* 198:58, *Sbiurei Shevet HaLevy* on *Mebaber* 198:47.

15 *Mebaber* 198:17, *Sbiurei Shevet HaLevy* and *Darbei Tabara*. Two reasons: the dye doesn't have a substance, rather only a color and she isn't particular about its being there; to the contrary, she wants it there, *Beis Yosef*, *Bodei Hasbulchan* 198:118. See *Shach* 198:21. Some *poskim* require its removal. Each woman should clarify her community's custom.

16 *Poskim*.

17 *Tabara Kealachba* 19:47.

18 On condition that it is completely immersed.

therefore she should not accustom herself to cutting it in preparation for immersion¹⁹, which may cause it to be viewed as an intervening substance for her.

If she did accustom herself, however, she should indeed attempt to cut it²⁰ and is permitted even during *chol hamoed*, the day before the last *Yom Tov* in preparation for immersion on *motzei Yom Tov*, *sefiros haomer* and the week in which *Tisha BeAv* falls²¹.

If, however, she cannot get her hair cut, she nonetheless immerses at the proper time²².

SKIN

Bandages as well as medicinal creams invalidate the immersion²³. If a bandage cannot be removed, an orthodox Rabbi expert in these laws should be consulted.

If she rubbed her hands together to remove dough, mud, or clay, yet strands remained when she immersed, this invalidates the immersion²⁴.

If she immersed with flakes or peeling of skin, caused by extended sitting in the bathtub, her immersion is valid²⁵.

CUTS . Dry blood on a cut invalidates the immersion²⁶. Moist blood²⁷ or pus²⁸ in the cut does not invalidate the immersion. If, however, they extend outside the cut they invalidate the immersion²⁹.

SPLINTERS . A splinter completely below the skin level, even if it can be seen, does not

19 *Sbiurei Shevet HaLevy* on *Ramo* 198:20.

20 *Sbiurei Shevet HaLevy* on *Ramo* 198:20. Ideally she should not have a haircut the three days prior to immersing, as explained in Chapter Seven.

21 *Tabara Kehalachta* 19:83 see note 233, *Sbiurei Shevet HaLevy* on *Mehaber* 198:20.

22 *Sbiurei Shevet HaLevy* on *Mehaber* 198:20. *Igros Moshe Yoreh Deab* (2) section 80. *Bodei Hashulchan* 198:148.

23 *Mehaber* 198:10.

24 *Mehaber* 198:13, *Taz* 198:16, *Shach* 198:18.

25 *Darhei Teshuva* 198:50.

26 *Mehaber* 198:9.

27 *Mehaber* 198:15.

28 *Mehaber* 198:9.

29 *Poskim*.