



THE BEARD:

**Where Chassidim
and Misnagdim Agree**

**THE POSITION OF THE CHOFETZ CHAIM
AND OTHER LITVISH GEDOLIM
REGARDING THE BEARD AND SHAVING**

By: Rabbi Moshe Wiener

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**“Year after year my father admonished
[people] regarding shaving the beard, both
orally, in writing, and in his publications”**

*(the son of the Chofetz Chaim in his biography
of his father, published in his introduction to Michtevai
Chofetz Chaim, p. 57)*



י"ל לקראת ה"יארצייט" הרביעי
ולעילוי נשמת
אדוני אבי ר' **זאב וואלף** ב"ר **יצחק** ע"ה **ווינער**
נלב"ע ש"ק פרשת יתרו כ' שבט ה'תשע"ו

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CONTENTS

Halachic Stance of Chassidus regarding the Beard and Shaving; Clarification of the Position of the Tzemach Tzedek.....	5
The Position of the Chofetz Chaim Regarding the Beard and Shaving.....	8
Concurrence of the Opinion of the Chofetz Chaim (and other Litvish Gedolim) with that of the Tzemach Tzedek	14
The Position of the Chofetz Chaim (and other Litvish Gedolim) on Shaving Machines, the Method of Beard Removal Prevalent in the Orthodox Jewish World Today (the method of beard removal prevalent in the Orthodox Jewish world today).....	19
Beards in the Chofetz Chaim's Yeshiva in Radin: Response to the argument that students in the Chofetz Chaim's own yeshiva in Radin shaved their beards.....	25
Beards in the Litvish Yeshivos of Pre-War Europe: Why did bochurim in Litvish yeshivos remove their beards if the objection of the Chofetz Chaim and other Gedolim was so adamant?.....	28
The Hungarian Poskim Also Supported the Tzemach Tzedek's Position Regarding Shaving the Beard	37
The Sephardic Poskim Also Supported the Tzemach Tzedek's Position Regarding Shaving the Beard	39
Addendum: ע"ד סמוכות שיטת ה"אגרות משה" זצ"ל בענין מכונות גילוח (עם הסכמת הגר"ח קניבסקי שליט"א).....	41

לענ"ד הוא עושה בכך דבר טוב ומועיל
ואולי ע"י זה יתבררו ויתלבנו הדברים,
ויהי בכך הצלה מעון חמור"
(מכתב הגאון רבי שלמה זלמן אויערבאך זצ"ל למחבר ספר "הדרת פנים זקן"
נדפס בס' "הליכות שלמה" ה' תפלה עמ' י"א)

*Halachic Stance of Chassidus
regarding the Beard and Shaving*
**CLARIFICATION OF THE POSITION
OF THE TZEMACH TZEDEK**

The opinion of the third Rebbe of Lubavitch, the Tzemach Tzedek, prohibiting any removal and even trimming of the beard is well known and is elucidated in a lengthy and intricate halachic responsum published in his *Shaalos U'Teshuvos* (Y.D. 93).

In the words of the Tzemach Tzedek's grandson, the Rebbe Rashab of Lubavitch, the Tzemach Tzedek's position can be summarized as follows:

“There are many who are lenient and cut their beards with scissors..declaring that they are acting in accordance with the halachah..It is our obligation to announce publicly that *they are in error*, for this is absolutely prohibited (*issur gomur*) according to Torah law (*mid'oraysa*), as many of the earlier and later Torah giants (Rishonim and Acharonim) have proven and clarified that those who do so transgress *several* Torah prohibitions (*kama lavin*), as was demonstrated by the Rebbe the Tzemach Tzedek. Also the Gaon HaChacham R' Chaim Hezekiah Medini in his [halachic encyclopedia entitled] *Sdei Chemed* quotes many *Geonim* [who concur that cutting the beard with scissors is prohibited], first and foremost amongst them is the Gaon the author of the *Maaseh Rokeach*...” (The Rebbe Rashab in a “Public

Announcement” addressed [not only to his chassidim, but] “To [ALL] our Jewish brethren, ‘believers, children of believers” and published in *Igros Kodesh* of the Rebbe Rashab, vol. 2, p. 927, and *Shalos U’Teshuvos Toras Sholom*, sec. 45).

Similarly, the great-grandson of the Tzemach Tzedek, the Rebbe Rayatz of Lubavitch, defines the Tzemach Tzedek’s position in his own lengthy halachic treatise on the topic:

“Concerning cutting the beard...even with regard to trimming with scissors...even in order to straighten the hairs of one’s beard and style them...my holy grandfather, the *tzaddik* and *gaon*, of blessed memory, discussed this at length in his work, Tzemach Tzedek. According to his holy and expansive view, *halachah* and Kabbalah coincide in this case that it is forbidden. He holds...that trimming the beard even slightly is not merely a kabbalistic stringency, but a matter forbidden by *halachah*. My grandfather, the *gaon* and *tzaddik*, forbade it, and he had self-sacrifice regarding this issue. He is the supreme halachic authority in our entire country, and the final halachic decisor for all countries....” (Responsum of the Rebbe Rayatz, printed in *Kovetz Yagdil Torah*, New York, Sivan-Tammuz 5743, sec. 61).

In the words of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe:

“With regard to growing the beard...according to the Rebbe the Tzemach Tzedek and many halachic authorities who preceded him and followed him, [cutting the beard] involves a clear Scriptural prohibition, as he explains in his responsa and with further elaboration in

his *Piskei Dinim*. See also *Darchoi Teshuvah* to Yoreh Deah and the collection of responsa *Minchas Elazar*, vol. 2, sec. 48. Several perspectives — according to both the revealed dimension of Torah and its inner, mystical dimension — are comprehensively collected in the *sefer Amudei Arazim* (Jerusalem), by R. Margolis. He cites wondrous and awe-inspiring points both with regard to growing the beard and its opposite. He also includes a letter from the Rogatchover Gaon (R. Yosef Rosen) which states that [cutting the beard with scissors] is an outright prohibition (*issur gomur*)” (*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 12, p. 206; *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 22, p. 490. See also *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 7, p. 325, where it states that even slightly trimming the beard to straighten it is included in the Tzemach Tzedek’s ruling).

THE POSITION OF THE CHOFETZ CHAIM REGARDING THE BEARD AND SHAVING

*What was the position regarding this issue held by the **Chofetz Chaim**, the undisputed leader and halachic authority of non-Chassidic Jewry and universally revered by all Jewry? [Many are of the impression that the mesorah of the Litvish communities is to be beardless.]*

In the 1890s, when the trend to shave the beard was gaining popularity in the Litvish regions of Lithuania and Russia and beyond (due to various secular influences), the Chofetz Chaim published a booklet titled *Kuntres Tiferes Odom*. In this volume, the Chofetz Chaim systematically and vigorously refuted all the justifications being advanced to defend removing the beard (e.g., to help find a *shidduch*, to help find a job, to improve one's appearance, and so on), and he sharply declared that these justifications were against the Torah (providing a thorough explanation for this as well). The first page of this *sefer* provides us with additional clarification about the position of the Chofetz Chaim regarding shaving the beard:

“Especially today...it is a great mitzvah for the entire Jewish people to reinforce this observance, and to refrain from trimming the beard even with scissors.”¹

¹ In his *sefer Nidchei Yisroel* (ch. 26), the Chofetz Chaim advises that instead of shaving with a razor, a person should shorten his beard with scissors or remove it with depilatory cream instead. However, this does not contradict the quotations from the Chofetz Chaim cited here, for the following reasons:

- The Chofetz Chaim wrote *Nidchei Yisroel* for Jews living in America and other foreign lands in 1893 (where and when beards were not accepted or tolerated). The

Chofetz Chaim wrote in *Nidchei Yisroel* that even if those living in America and similar lands are at risk of great financial loss or even if they are the subject of torment, they should still not remove their beards! Only if they could not withstand the pressures of their evil inclination, or if they were at risk of persecution (i.e., situations of immense *shaas hadechak* and possible danger)—only then did the Chofetz Chaim guide them to shorten their beards with scissors or use depilatory cream, rather than shave with a razor. It is possible that all Poskim would give similar counsel to such individuals who were shaving with a razor, since trimming with scissors or depilatory cream involve a lower level of halachic severity than a razor (see below that this does not apply to those shaving with a shaving machine). Hence, this citation from *Nidchei Yisroel* does not contradict the other writings of the Chofetz Chaim or the position of other Poskim who decry all forms of removing the beard.

- The son of the Chofetz Chaim writes in his *Kitzur Toldos HaChofetz Chaim* (pp. 56-57) that his father prohibited *Nidchei Yisroel* from being sold in Europe (except to parents of children who moved to America or similar lands, who needed to guide their offspring), since the halachic leniencies in *Nidchei Yisroel* only applied to situations of extreme duress and were not applicable to those still living in Europe. When the Chofetz Chaim suspected that booksellers were selling *Nidchei Yisroel* to the general population locally in Europe to increase their revenues, the Chofetz Chaim launched an investigation and was extremely upset. Based on this, we can safely extrapolate that the Chofetz Chaim would be of the opinion that the leniencies in *Nidchei Yisroel* are not acceptable to Jews living anywhere in the world today, and certainly not in the United States, Eretz Yisroel, or other countries where Jews are free from persecution.
- The son of the Chofetz Chaim further writes in his biography of his father (ibid.) that after copies of *Nidchei Yisroel* reached the general population in Europe, some individuals raised the concern that readers might misunderstand what he wrote as a general dispensation to cut the beard. It was at that time that the Chofetz Chaim authored *Kuntres Tiferes Odom* and had it printed as an addendum to all printings of *Nidchei Yisroel*, so readers would see how severe it is to remove the beard in any way (even to shorten it with scissors) and how vehemently he was opposed to it.
- The most conclusive response to this question is that the Chofetz Chaim himself attested in a letter that he published *Kuntres Tiferes Odom* **to correct** what he wrote in *Nidchei Yisroel* regarding cutting the beard with scissors (see the Chofetz Chaim's letter in *Michtevei Chofetz Chaim, siman 81*).
- It is critical to note that the entire discussion here relates to shortening the beard with scissors or removing it with depilatory cream. The prevalent method of removing the beard nowadays is with an electric shaver which, according to the Chofetz Chaim, has the halachic status of a razor (not scissors), as documented in the text below.

[Descendants of the Chofetz Chaim have testified that they do not cut their beards because the Chofetz Chaim “told his children that none of his descendants should ever touch it” (see: <http://yeranenaakov.blogspot.com/2011/07/will-real-hafetz-hayim-please-stand-up.html>).]

In contradistinction to the common presumption that the accepted Litvish practice is to be beardless, the Chofetz Chaim attests in the first chapter of this work that until that time, *only* “*one in a thousand*” shaved their beards.

To further demonstrate how adamant, resolute, and vehement the position of the Chofetz Chaim was regarding the growth of the beard, let us examine several quotations from his Tiferes Odom:

THE BEARD: AN OBJECT OF HOLINESS

- “It is an important duty for the Jewish people to stand firm on this issue and refrain from trimming their beards even with scissors... I remember that when a Jewish man used to take an oath, he would swear by the *pei’os* [corners] of his head and by his beard” (*Kuntres Tiferes Odom*, ch. 1) [See Tractate Shavuos 38b where it is explained that certain oaths must be taken while holding a sacred article—a Torah scroll or, in certain situations, *tefillin*. To simulate such a circumstance, in certain situations an oath would be taken while holding the beard, for it was also considered a sacred article.]

[As is evident in these words of the Chofetz Chaim, (even the most simple) Jews always treated the beard as an object of holiness. Moreover, Jews recognized that there is an equivalence between the hairs of the beard and remnants of holy texts (*sheimos*). No less a *Litvish Gadol* than the *Steipler Gaon* would put aside the hairs of his beard that fell off, placing them in a designated place on his bookshelves. He would not place them in books. Afterwards, he would send them to the cemetery in a bag together with the remnants of holy texts (*sheimos*) (*Orchos Rabbeinu*, p. 200).]

- **“If one lets his beard grow...one can certainly expect that Hashem will provide him with a fitting marriage partner—an intelligent and G-d-fearing woman who will be his helpmate during his life (as our Sages say: “If one merits, she will help him”), and they will be privileged to raise a generation of upright children in whom he can rejoice as they sit around his table...His marriage will be pleasant, and Hashem will provide them with a livelihood. They will be privileged to have upright children, and he will experience a good life with the wife whom Hashem has designated for him...**

“On the other hand, if one does not place his trust in Hashem and he turns from the path of His commandments, surely Hashem will not desire to treat him well. Instead of the love and favor he hopes to gain by trimming his beard, eventually it will turn, G-d forbid, to bitterness and poison through lack of livelihood and other prevalent causes, because Hashem’s blessing will not rest among them. Sometimes it will reach the point that he will need to wander far away to find his livelihood, and then, what benefit will he have from this [temporary] joy? In fact, all of this is explained in holy Torah sources—that by standing firm to fulfill Hashem’s commandments, one is privileged to raise a generation of upright children” (Ibid.)

- **“This transgression is more severe than others, for they [relate to matters that] are outside the body, while this transgression becomes adhered to one’s very appearance and image. For the Holy One, blessed be He, created the appearance of a man different from that of a woman.**

[This person] willfully transgresses the will of G-d and violates His commandment [through] shaving. He carries his severe sin on his face continuously. He must contemplate: How can he have the insolence to request that G-d grant his needs, when he carries the seal of rebellion on his face?!” (Ibid., ch. 4).

- “When a person casts away his beard and shaves it, it is a sign that his heart has turned away from the path of G-d and is full of deception and frivolity” (Ibid.).
- “There are those whom the yetzer hora tempts with the thought: ‘I am not alone in this city; whatever will happen to the others who shave their beards will happen to me.’ To what can this be compared? To a person suspected of rebelling against the king. If he offers the defense: ‘I am not alone’... he will be told immediately: ‘The prison is large.’ So, too, with regard to the matter at hand. Gehinom is very large. Indeed, our entire world is a mere fraction of the size of Gehinom, as stated in Pesachim 94” (Ibid., ch. 9).
- “It is explained in the holy Zohar and the texts of the kabbalists that [trimming the beard] causes a great blemish above. The matter can be understood from the fact that [the beard] represents the essential image of man established by G-d. A person’s image reflects the holiness of his soul, as it is written: ‘He made man in the image of G-d.’ Therefore, a person who has the brazenness to commit this severe and bitter sin *should fear and tremble*. If one sinned, he should rush to repent. He should not look at his foolish comrades whose yetzer [hora] overpowered their intellect” (Ibid., ch. 10).

- **“The general concept derived from this *kuntres* is that the beard is a litmus test whether a person is G-d-fearing, whether with regard to a *shidduch* or for other matters”**
(Ibid. ch. 11).

Moreover, in his sefer *Machaneh 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 (ch. 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?!

[See below regarding the position of the Chofetz Chaim on shaving machines, the method of beard removal prevalent in the Orthodox Jewish world today.]

**CONCURRENCE OF THE OPINION
OF THE CHOFETZ CHAIM
(AND OTHER LITVISH GEDOLIM)
WITH THAT OF THE TZEMACH TZEDEK**

The Chofetz Chaim does not mention the Tzemach Tzedek (and we do not know whether the Chofetz Chaim ever saw the aforementioned responsum of the Tzemach Tzedek) However, it is of immense significance that the Chofetz Chaim concludes that one of the halachic bases for not (even) trimming the beard is the prohibition of *Lo Yilbash* (which forbids men from utilizing female dress and methods of beautification), just as the Tzemach Tzedek does. (Furthermore, the Chofetz Chaim even cites one of the same Talmudic proofs cited by the Tzemach Tzedek to the application of *Lo Yilbash* beard cutting.) In the words of the Chofetz Chaim himself:

“Know that even if on the surface [merely] styling the beard does not appear to involve a transgression, in truth it is included in the commandment: “A man should not wear the garment of a woman.” Adorning oneself was permitted only for women.... Proof of this concept can be brought from Shabbos 92b which states that even picking gray hairs from dark hairs is forbidden, because he is endeavoring to enhance his appearance and look younger. Rambam’s view is that this is punished with lashes; see *Beis Yosef*, Yoreh Deah, sec. 182. Moreover, by doing so, he incites the *yetzer hora* to [tempt] him” (*Kuntres Tiferes Odom*, ch. 6).

Similarly, the Gadol Hador of our generation, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, defines the Chofetz Chaim's position on shaving with the following words:

“Targum Yonasan states that one who does this transgresses the prohibition of “A man should not wear the garment of a woman,” which includes cutting the beard using scissors. *Sefer HaChinuch* states the same, adding that one also transgresses the prohibition of ‘You should not follow the statutes [of the non-Jews].’ This is quoted by the Chofetz Chaim in his *Sefer HaMitzvos HaKotzer* (prohibition 177)” (*Orchos Yosher*, ch. 5).

[It should be noted that Rav Kanievsky does not mention the Tzemach Tzedek, but rather cites the opinion of a Talmudic Tanna, the Targum Yonasan, who invoked the *issur* of *Lo Yilbash* as applying to removing the beard, just as the Tzedek Tzedek did about 1900 years later.]

See the sefer *Edus l'Yisroel* p. 145, where Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin zt'l (a Litvish posek referred to by Rav Elyashiv zt'l as the “*Mara d'Asra of America*” — see *Yeshurun* vol. 20, pp. 153f) wrote that although many people rely on halachic leniencies (*heterim*) to shave, there are great Rishonim and Acharonim who vehemently disagreed and prohibited removing the beard (even) with scissors or depilatory cream (*sam*). “Citing the Tzemach Tzedek, Rav Henkin stated:

“ואמנם בס' צמח צדק החדש הרעיש ע"ז, די ש מהראשונים הסוברים
שדין השחתה וגילוח נאמר רק לענין חיוב, אבל איסור יש אף בהשחתה
לבד.”

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, 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. ("אין זה רצון התורה אם הוא עובר על הטעם")

Hence, Rav Henkin states, any leniencies regarding shaving are meant only for extraordinarily harsh circumstances (*shaas hadchack*) and are not for everyone to rely upon under normal circumstances. "והדין שהוא בניגוד להטעם הוא רק פתח הצלה בשעת הדחק" [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 **for *b'nei Torah*, and especially for Rabbonim,** any *heterim* to shave with a scissors-like device or to remove the beard with a depilatory cream are **certainly not adequate.** ("לבני התורה ובפרט לרבנים אין היתר זה מספיק")

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

"Additionally, the peyos and beard serve as a shield to protect us from associating with evil company, because 'the cursed does not cleave to the blessed' — namely, to someone with the appearance of a Jew. Chazal have already stated, 'Create a fence to safeguard the Torah.'

"Furthermore, many unlawful people shave with razors and say they used powder. Many simple people don't understand the difference between them, and once permission has been granted to shave with powder, they do not differentiate [and shave with razors]."

The Posek Hador, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, also believed that one should adhere to the position of the Tzemach Tzedek, as was attested to by his grandchildren in the sefer Halichos Shlomo:

”היתה דעתו כי הראוי והנכון לגדל הזקן...מלבד שהעיר איך מחמירים בכל הדברים ואילו בזה אין חוששין למש”כ הצמח צדק (ליובאוויטש, חיו”ד סי’ צ”ג) דאית ב’ משום לא ילבש” (כ”כ נכדיו בשמו בס’ הליכות שלמה, הלכות תפלה, ירות”ו, תש”ס, עמ’ יב)

The late Gadol Hador, Rav Aharon Yehuda Leib Shteinman, also accepted that shaving may be prohibited based on lo yilbash, and stated:

”ממ”נ לא טוב, אם מגלח במכונה הרי יש חשש לאו דאורייתא וגם אם מגלח עם משחה זה לא חלק, היות ויש אומרים שיש בזה משום: 'לא ילבש'” (פרי חיים ממדון הרב שטיינמן, שופר ארגון להפצת יהדות, צוות שופר גנזי המלך, כו תמוז תשע”ב)

“Any method you use to shave your beard will be problematic,” Maran HaRav Shteinman replied. “Using an electric shaver may involve an issur d’oraysa. Even using shaving cream is not clearly acceptable, as some say this involves the issur of lo yilbash.”

Similarly, HaGaon Rav Moshe Sternbuch in his responsa Teshuvos V’Hanhagos (1:529) accepts the validity of the application of lo yilbash to removing the beard and rules that a son does not have to obey his father who ordered him to shave his beard – even if the father asks him to do so with scissors or depilatory cream, because there are poskim who prohibit doing so due to the prohibition of lo yilbash. [If the father demands that the son use an electric shaver, Rav Sternbuch writes that the son most certainly does not have to listen to his father].

An entire chapter is dedicated to this topic in the *sefer Hadras Ponim Zokon* (Section 2, ch. 3) where many other later Poskim are quoted, including a *teshuvah* from the *Rogatchover Gaon*, considered by many as one of the greatest Geonim in the past several centuries, who explains at length (also without mentioning

the Tzemach Tzedek) that *lo yilbash* applies to the beard, and concludes:

”לענין איסור לספר הזקן במספרים... באמת הארכתי דודאי אסור מן התורה, רק אינו לוקה...ודאי הוי איסור תורה...יהיו נזהרים מאוד שלא יספרו הזקן כי זה איסור גמור...לא יוסיפו עוד לעשות כו” (ספר שו”ת צפנת פענח ח”ד סימן רנח)

“Concerning the prohibition of cutting the beard with scissors...in truth, I have explained at length that it is certainly a Biblical prohibition, just that lashes are not administered.... It is definitely a Biblical prohibition.... You should be very careful not to trim the beard, for this is an absolute prohibition.... You should desist from doing so” (*Shaalos u’Teshuvos Tzafnas Paneach, vol. 4, sec. 258*).

**THE POSITION OF THE CHOFETZ CHAIM
(AND OTHER LITVISH GEDOLIM)
ON SHAVING MACHINES, THE METHOD OF
BEARD REMOVAL PREVALENT IN THE
ORTHODOX JEWISH WORLD TODAY**

Years after Kuntres *Tiferes Odam* was printed, the Chofetz Chaim published (in five volumes during the years 1920-1925) his *sefer Likkutei Halachos* on Tractate Makkos. There (p. 14b, *ein mishpat* op. cit.) the Chofetz Chaim rules that the shaving machines of his time (before electric shavers were introduced) had the same halachic status as a razor (which all agree is prohibited). Rav Yosef Sholom Elyashiv zt”l, the Posek Hador, wrote in a *teshuvah* published in his *sefer Kovetz Teshuvos* (vol. 1, sec. 32) that the electric shavers of today (**the method of beard removal used by almost all Orthodox Jews who shave**) are unquestionably infinitely more halachically unacceptable than those that existed in the times 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.

In the words of Rav Elazar Menachem Shach, the late Rosh Yeshiva of Ponevezh who was venerated throughout the Litvish Torah world:

“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 zt”l ruled that the use of all shaving machines is forbidden. This is my response, (signed) Elazar Menachem M. Shach” (*Michtavim U’Maamarim* 3:75).

See also the widely publicized *psak din* (dated Nissan, 5768) signed by the greatest non-Chassidic halachic authorities of our time (including Rav Elyashiv zt”l, Rav Aharon L. Steinman zt”l, Rav Shmuel HaLevi Vosner zt”l, Rav Michel Y. Lefkowitz zt”l, Rav Nissim Karelitz zt”l, Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlit”a, Rav Shmuel Auerbach zt”l, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel zt”l, and another twenty-six Litvish Roshei Yeshiva):

“The severe breach of *halachah* involved in the use of shaving machines is well known to all. Their use was prohibited by our teachers, 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 objection of the Chofetz Chaim to shaving machines and his equating them with razors was so absolute that, based on his opinion, it was ruled by the Chazon Ish, the Steipler Gaon, Rav Aharon Kotler, Rav Shach, Rav Chaim Kanievsky and others that one may not give a shaving machine to a Jew who shaves with a razor to use instead of a razor. (For documentation of these

rulings, including facsimiles of *kisvei yad*, see *Authoritative Responses to Common Misconceptions*, ch. 23.)

See further in Halichos Shlomo (ibid.) where a letter from Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l to the author of the sefer *Hadras Ponim Zokon* is quoted, stating:

“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.”

Some are concerned that only the Gedolim of Eretz Yisroel prohibit shaving machines, but not the Gedolim of America. This assertion is disputed and refuted by what was written by a Litvish Gadol Hador in America, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt'l. 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 upon [any] tradition (mesorah) [to be lenient].”

Furthermore, in a letter dated 6 Shevat 5774, Rav Yaakov's son, the late Rav Noson Kamenetzky, wrote: “I hereby attest that my

father [Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky] never, ever permitted shaving machines.”

Another Gadol Hador in America was Rav Aharon Kotler zt'l. According to the testimony of Rav Aharon Kotler's zt'l major talmidim (such as Rav Moshe Heinemann, Rav Eliya Ber Wachtfogel, Rav Yechezkel Perr, and others in letters published in the sefer Hadrass Ponim Zokan Section 2, ch. 1), Rav Aharon Kotler ruled that electric shavers are absolutely prohibited. In fact, Rav Aharon Kotler zt'l told Rav Menachem Perr zt'l that he may not give electric shavers to his non-religious congregants to use instead of razors (see the sefer Hadrass Ponim Zokan Section 2, ch. 1. This is also related in a letter written by his son, Rav Yechezkel Perr shlita, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Derech Aishon in Far Rockaway, printed in the miluyim to the sefer Hadrass Ponim Zokan). Additionally, Rav Aharon Kotler's zt'l 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 to be prohibited.

Another American Gadol, Rav Yitzchok Hutner zt'l (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Chaim Berlin), attested that Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski zt'l (Rov of Vilna, author of *Achiezer* and *Posek Hador* of his generation) considered the shaving machines of his time to constitute a “sofek issur d'oraysa” [when there is a doubt about a fact where a Torah prohibition applies, halacha requires that the strict position regarding the rule be taken] (quoted in *Sefer Hadrass Ponim Zokan*, miluyim to Section 2 ch. 1, p. 715; see there for corroborating testimony from Rav Chaim Ozer's personal barber).

**WHICH IS MORE SEVERE,
CHILUL SHABBOS OR SHAVING WITH AN ELECTRIC SHAVER?**

The magnitude of the halachic severity involved in the use of electric shavers is explained by Rav Moshe Sternbuch shlita (whose letterhead states that he is a great-grandson of the Vilna Gaon and whose sefarim Moadim U'Zemanim are studied in all the litvishe yeshivos) in a letter published in the sefer Hadras 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 sekilah). 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.”

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

החזון איש כל מכונה וכ"כ כל גדולי הדור

"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.*"

**BEARDS IN THE CHOFETZ CHAIM'S
YESHIVA IN RADIN:
*Response to the argument that students
in the Chofetz Chaim's own yeshiva
in Radin shaved their beards***

- Rav Naftoli Trop zt”l 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.”
- If bochorim 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 his introduction to *Michtevei 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 reality 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, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim in Suffern, New York. This testimony is cited by HaGaon Rav Moshe Sternbuch,

shlit”a, in *Teshuvos V’Hanhagos* vol. 5, sec. 264, and is quoted verbatim in *Hadras 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 *sefer Nidchei Yisroel*. In particular, that *tzaddik* [the Chofetz Chaim zt”l] 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 far 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* R. 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 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 then 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.”

**BEARDS IN THE LITVISH YESHIVOS
OF PRE-WAR EUROPE:**

*Why did bochurim in Litvish yeshivos
remove their beards*

*If the objection of the Chofetz Chaim
and other Gedolim was so adamant?*

MIRRER ROSH YESHIVA'S TESTIMONY

As for the reason why bochurim in Litvish 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 (ch. 1, p. 28) Rav Kalmanowitz's testimony in this matter. Rav Kalmanowitz is quoted there as saying that the reason the bochurim 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.”²

Beard Removal due to Concerns of *Ga'avah* and *Yuhara* (and *Gadlus HaAdam*)

² There are those who assert that beards were discouraged in Litvish yeshivos out of concern for *ga'avah* and *yuhara*. There are many cases in *halachah* where one is discouraged from adopting a stringency because it appears to be an expression of religious haughtiness (*yuhara*). Some claim that the same applies to growing a beard.

The obvious refutation to this claim is that this concern was not voiced by *Gedolei Yisroel* throughout our history. (This is evidenced by the fact that a full beard was always part of the traditional appearance of a Jew, as documented at length in the *sefer Hadrass Ponim Zokon* [Part Two, ch. 19]. Indeed, the Chofetz Chaim wrote in *Kuntres Tiferes Odom* [ch. 1] that until

his time, even in the Litvish communities, only one in a thousand men cut their beards.) Additionally, no less an authority than the Chasam Sofer *zt'l* presents the Torah's position repudiating this concern. (See: פנקס קדשו עה"ת ב'פ' האזינו בשנת תק"ף לפ"ק - נעתק בס' דרשות חת"ם סופר - בהערות המהדיר לדרוש לח' תמוז בדף שד', ב במהדורת הרב יוסף נפתלי שטערן, תרפ"ט) [ואף שהזכיר שם "השחתת הזקן בתער", פשוט שטעמו ונימוקו - הסרת ה"פאר" - שייך גם בהסרת הזקן ע"י סם או מכונת גילוח, שמשחיתים ע"ז ה"תפארת פניו של אדם" ממש כמו תער, וזיל בתר טעמא, וק"ל].

*Here is a synopsis of the Chasam Sofer *zt'l*'s statement:*

The verse states, "שחת לו לא בניו מומם" (*Devarim* 32:5). The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* explains this verse as follows:

The opening words, "Shiches lo—Destruction is his," refers to one who cuts his beard. Doing so is called "destruction."

As the Ibn Ezra explains (*Vayikra* 19:27), this is because the beard brings beauty to one's visage, and removing it destroys that beauty. Therefore, "lo banav—they are not His sons," because they are disregarding and rejecting the beauty Hashem has given them, as if they are not His sons.

The Gemara states (*Megilah* 29a) that haughtiness is viewed as a blemish. A man might therefore consider to remove his beard, presuming that by doing so he will avoid haughtiness and be complete. The verse therefore continues, "mumam—their blemish." To the contrary, not only will he not become complete, he will be blemished, as there is no greater blemish than displaying that one is not the son of Hashem.

Others attribute beard removal in the Litvish yeshivos to the *Gadlus HaAdam* ideology of the Alter of Slabodka (which included emphasis that the "Majesty of Man" be reflected in one's appearance).

The Chasam Sofer's aforementioned words would equally apply to and negate this approach, since this ideology is similarly antithetical to the tenet that it is the beard (*not its removal*) which is the "Gadlus HaAdam—Majesty of Man." (To use the terminology of Chazal, the beard is "Hadrus Ponim—the Beauty of one's Appearance" [*Shabbos* 152a.] – and not the opposite).

Similarly, in his *Kuntres Tiferes Odor* (ch. 5), the Chofetz Chaim dismisses the argument that shaving improves one's appearance. [The Chofetz Chaim describes how foolish it is (and that it is an incitement of the *Yetzer Hora*) to think that shaving makes one more handsome. According to our Torah, the opposite is true; it is the beard that is the splendor and elegance of a man's countenance]. On the contrary, "...throughout our history, it has been a **disgrace** [not an enhancement!] 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" (Rav Chaim Kanievsky *shlit'a* in his *sefer Orchos Yosher*, ch. 5).

Furthermore, as documented later in this chapter, the Rosh Yeshiva of the very same yeshiva of Slabodka, Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein, opposed this approach and advocated that bochorim keep their beards. He used very scathing language concerning shaving the beard in the preface to his *sefer Levush Mordechai* (on *Bava Kama*).

[The concept of the beard (and not its removal) being "the majesty of man" was articulated by a protégé of the Slabodka Yeshiva – Rav Avigdor Miller (who later served as *Mashgiach Ruchani* of the litvish Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin): "Now, you have to understand that hadras ponim, the beauty of a Jewish face, is enhanced by a beard. A beard doesn't take away the beauty of the face; on the contrary a male face is much more attractive when it has a beard. It's like a woman's hair. A woman without hair on her head, a bald-headed woman, she's not attractive. A Jew without a beard on his face is not attractive" (Thursday Nights Questions & Answers with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, TAPE # E-139). "A beard, you must know, is a sign of authority...you're more assertive, you're more important...it means men must be the leaders...so now you know why it's worthwhile for a man to grow a beard, to let him know that he's a man...the beard identifies him as the leader of the family" (*Ask Rabbi Miller*, Simchas Hachaim Publishing, 2019, pp.296-297)]

It is recorded that Rav Yosef Leib Bloch of Telz embraced this approach of Gadlus HaAdam to justify the students being beardless. However, see later in this chapter that removal of the beard was passionately rejected by Rav Bloch's own father-in-law and predecessor as Rosh Yeshiva of Telz -- Rav Eliezer Gordon.

There are those who claim that Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv of Kelm (the *Alter of Kelm*) adapted this viewpoint. This impression is mistaken. Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv of Kelm was insistent that the disciples in his traditional yeshiva keep their beards. However, he maintained a separate, non-traditional yeshiva (which included secular studies) for students from families who were influenced by the *Haskalah* movement. In that yeshiva he did not require beards, so that the parents of these students would not withdraw their sons from the yeshiva. These facts were attested to by his grandson-in-law, Rav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, and transmitted by Rav Dessler's son-in-law, Rav Eliyahu Yehoshua Geldzahler, as recorded in the *sefer Hadras Ponim Zokon* (third ed., p. 686).

Moreover: The *Gadlus HaOdom* philosophy was intended as a response to the propaganda of the *maskilim* (i.e., that yeshiva students were unsophisticated boors lacking all refinement). It was intended to raise the status of Torah learning by cultivating intellectual sophistication, precision in speech and manners, and fashionable dress and grooming. In this way, the *talmidim* would begin to view themselves (and would be viewed by others) as an elite group of young leaders and the *crème* of Jewish society.

However, this approach is certainly not relevant in our present-day society. "Our circumstances are very different...stylish dress will not attract the masses of non-observant Jews, and whereas Eastern European styles were set by aristocrats, today's trend-setters tend to be pop-culture celebrities whose styles are hardly models for *Bnei Torah* to emulate. Since fashionably dressed yeshiva students are unlikely to influence the non-observant (and interestingly, many potential *baalei teshuva* are particularly attracted to Jews who eschew modern dress), the trend has moved in the opposite direction, using clothing to help maintain a separate Charedi group identity" (Rabbi Yisroel Miller, *In Search of Torah Wisdom: Questions You Forgot to Ask Your Rabbi*, Mosaica Press, 2012, pp. 88–91).

The Chazon Ish ז"ל articulated his rejection of the concept that beard removal should be encouraged based on *ga'avah* or *yuhara* or *gadlus HaAdam*:

ראה ספר התולדות של חזון איש (פאר הדור עמ' ר"ג): "פגישה ... בין אחד מגדולי בעלי המוסר, המשגיח המפורסם של ישיבת מיר, רבי ירוחם זצ"ל.. התנהגותם הכללית של בחורי ישיבת ליטא .. שמספרים את זקנם .. והחזון איש הגיב על כך, שאין כל תשובה ממשית .. וכל התירוצים והאמתלאות שמשיבים עליהם אינם אלא ישוב דוחק ואין להם על מה שיסמוכו." ובס' קובץ אגרות החזון איש ח"א ס' קצח (בענין מכונת גילוח): "ואף שפשטה המחלה גם בין התורנים [=הבני תורה] יחיו, לא נשתנה הדבר בשביל זה, ולכן נפשי סולדת בענין זה," עכ"ל מרן החזון איש שם.

The famous *mashgiach* of Yeshivas Mir, Rav Yerucham Levovitz ז"ל, once met with the Chazon Ish. Their discussion turned to the question of why the *bochurim* in Litvishe yeshivos shaved their beards. The Chazon Ish replied that no substantive justification exists for doing so, and all the excuses given for this conduct are faulty and have no reliable basis (*Pe'er Hador*, p. 250). Similarly, the Chazon Ish wrote in a letter (*Kovetz Igros* I:198): "Although this sickness has even spread among *bnei Torah*, the matter has not changed as a result, and my soul seethes from this."

I will conclude this discussion with the following statement from the late Gadol Hador, Rav Aharon Yehuda Leib Shteinman ז"ל:

וכנגד הטענה שיש אומרים דהו כ"יורהא" שמחשיב את עצמו כמושלם... אמר רבינו בהדומנות "דבכל זאת עדיף שיגדל זקן וזה שומר קצת על האדם ברוחניות" (פרי חיים ממרן הרב שטיינמן, שופר ארגון להפצת יהדות, צוות שופר גנוי המלך, כו תמוז תשעב).

Some claim that growing a beard demonstrates arrogance (*yuhara*), as if he thinks he is perfect.

"It is still better to grow a beard," Maran HaRav Shteinman once commented. "This

THE CHAZON ISH'S TESTIMONY

The genesis of beard removal amongst Litvish B'nei Torah was confirmed by the Chazon Ish a Litvish *gaon* respected by all as a Gadol Hador, with these words:

The *Chazon Ish*, wrote as follows:

“If it is not a *sam hamoves* [poison], it is certainly not a *sam hachayim* [life-giving potion]. This matter is very difficult for me to bear, as it runs contrary to the [Jewish] quality of modesty and it is not the Jewish style of dress. Instead, [*the Jews*] *have learned it from the non-Jews during their exile, thereby negating holiness*” (Kovetz Igros, vol. 1, #197, regarding *sam*, depilatory cream).

“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....”(Kovetz Igros, vol. 1, #198, concerning removing the beard with depilatory cream or close-cutting scissors).

“[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*” (Rav Chaim Kanievsky in his sefer *Orchos Yosher*, chapter 5).



POSITION OF THE SLABODKA ROSH YESHIVA

RAV MOSHE MORDECHAI EPSTEIN

When the bochurim in Slabodka started shaving, the Rosh

will protect a person spiritually to a certain extent.”

[For further study regarding this issue, please see *Hadras Ponim Zokon, Part 2, ch. 19.*]

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 Sodcha*, sec. 101). Furthermore, the Slabodka Rosh Yeshiva wrote very sharply:

“Every Jew should reflect on this [that a raven forsakes its children since they do not appear like it]. He should only have mercy on his children when they walk in the path 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 disdaining the sacred.... Their appearance is not similar to the Jewish people, for they have removed the *tzelem Elokim* [Divine image, a reference to the beard] from themselves” (Introduction to *Levush Mordechai* on Bava Kamma).



POSITION OF THE TELSHE ROSH YESHIVA

RAV ELIEZER GORDON

(AND OTHER GEDOLIM)

Regarding the Telz (Telshe) Yeshiva, it is recorded as follows:

“When the disease of cutting the beard spread among students of the [Litvish] yeshivos, the well-known *gaon*, R. Eliezer Gordon [Rov and Rosh Yeshiva of Telz], of blessed memory, adopted the most stringent measures [to stop it]. When he saw that they were persisting in their defiance, he mobilized the *geonim* of that time —

the venerable R. Y. Dovid Friedman [Rov of Pinsk-Karlin], the venerable R. Eliyahu Chaim Meisel [Rov of Lodz, Poland], and the mighty *geonim* R. Chaim HaLevi [Soloveitchik, Rov of Brisk], and R. Chaim Ozer [Grodzenski, Rov of Vilna], of blessed memory. He demanded that they place a prohibition on Rabbonim against granting *semichah* [to students who cut their beards], on *shochtim* against teaching them the skill of *shechitah*, and on Jewish communities against employing them in any religious position” (*Kovetz Yagdil Torah* 7:5)



TESTIMONY OF RAV AHARON KOTLER

The father of the today’s Litvish yeshiva and Kollel world was Rav Aharon Kotler, who stated:

“Growing a beard is a *malbush yehudi*, the traditional appearance of a Jew and the way our fathers and forefathers all conducted themselves. Hence, the beard falls under the halachic mandate to uphold the traditional practices of our people (‘Do not abandon the Torah of your mother’ [see Pesachim 50b])”[and Rav Aharon concluded that therefore a bochur does not have to obey his parents who insist that he remove his beard] (Quoted in the second volume of the *sefer Aish HaTorah*, p. 265—an authoritative biography of Rav Aharon Kotler authored by Rav Aharon Sorosky shlit”a, acclaimed biographer of many Gedolim)



RAV CHAIM KANIEVSKY'S TESTIMONY

Similarly, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, the universally respected non-Chassidic Gadol Hador of our time, attests in his *sefer Orchos Yosher* (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...”



TESTIMONY OF RAV SHTEINMAN

Let us conclude this discussion regarding the shaving practice in Litvishe yeshivos with the one-line response to this issue articulated by no less an authority than the late Gadol Hador of the non-Chassidic, Litvish world, Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman. Following is Rav Shteinman's response to the “argument” that the students of the Litvish yeshivos of yesteryear used to shave their beards:

ואומר רבינו: “כי מה שנהגו פעם בישיבות לגלח, כי לא היה ידוע האיסור”
(פרי חיים ממרן הרב שטיינמן, שופר ארגון להפצת יהדות, צוות שופר גנזי
המלך, כו תמוז תשע”ב)

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



*[It is important to note and emphasize 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 frum people shave today—namely, using an electric shaver (which was not available in*

pre-war Europe, and) which, in the words of Rav Chaim Kanievsky (cited above), has been prohibited by “all the Gedolei Hador.”]



For further elucidation, source references, and documentation regarding all the above, please see the well-known Hebrew encyclopedic sefer regarding the growth and cutting of the beard in halachah under the title **Hadras Ponim Zokon** (1,024 pages in the third edition; a fourth, expanded edition is in preparation). See also **Authoritative Responses to Common Misconceptions** (corrective responses to recent broadcasts discussing beards and shaving in halachah); and available through Amazon.

“A BEARD IS NOT A MIDAS CHASSIDUS— IT IS AN IKAR!”

Rabbi Dov Yaffe zt'l, mashgiach of Yeshivas Knesses Chizkiyahu, relates:

I once asked the Chazon Ish if I should adopt a practice termed *midas chassidus*—not required by law but adhered to by the pious—if it will aggravate my parents.

“To which *midas chassidus* are you referring?” he asked.

“Growing a beard,” I replied.

“Growing a beard is not a *midas chassidus*,” he responded. “It is an *ikar*, a mainstream concept in Judaism. The definition of a *midas chassidus* is a conduct Torah demands only from select individuals of singular piety. A Torah path that everyone must follow, by contrast, is an *ikar*.”

“Why must your parents be pained by your decision?” he then added. “On the contrary, they should be happy!”

Indeed, when I arrived home and my parents saw that I had begun to grow a beard, they were happy with my decision.

Maaseh Ish vol. 3, p. 27

**IS A BEARDLESS KOHEN ALLOWED
TO SERVE IN THE BEIS HAMIKDASH?**

Daas Torah from

Maran Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlita

The following was published on page 69 of

Rav Chaim Kanievsky's "Haggadah Shel Pesach Toras Chaim"

(translation adapted from Artscroll's

"Rav Chaim Kanievsky on Chumash," Bereishis, page 318):

A young man from Lakewood once came and presented the following question to Maran Rav Chaim Kanievsky:

"A relative of mine is suffering from acute renal failure," he said, "and desperately needs a kidney transplant. My whole family were tested and I am the only one who is a match. I am ready to undergo surgery to give him a kidney, but one thing is troubling me: I am a *Kohen*. When the *Beis HaMikdash* will speedily be rebuilt, I am afraid that donating a kidney will make me a *baal mum*, a "blemished" person who may not perform the *Avodah* (the Temple service)."

Rav Chaim Kanievsky answered him sharply, "A missing internal organ does not render one a *baal mum*. Not only are you allowed to donate your kidney without worrying about becoming disqualified to do the *Avodah*, it is a great mitzvah for you to save your relative's life, and that would preclude other considerations!"

Chastened, the young man got up to leave. Before he left the room, however, Rav Chaim called after him, "You are in any case not qualified to perform the *Avodah*."

The *Kohen* turned back to Rav Chaim in confusion. What had he done wrong, what *pesul* had Rav Chaim seen in him?

"The Ramban (Devarim 14:1) rules that a *Kohen* who does not have a beard is disqualified from the *Avodah*. You shave your beard, so you cannot serve..."

[Rav Chaim Kanievsky exhorted similarly to other Kohanim.]

**THE HUNGARIAN POSKIM ALSO SUPPORTED
THE TZEMACH TZEDEK'S POSITION
REGARDING SHAVING THE BEARD**

The holy Rebbe of Munkatch and author of *Shaalos U'Teshuvos Minchas Elozor* wrote the following impassioned response to a Rov who penned a rejection of the Tzemach Tzedek's position regarding shaving the beard:

“Many Gedolim and Poskim are of the opinion that [cutting the beard] with scissors...is prohibited... The latest such authority (and the most cherished) is the *gaon* of Lubavitch, zt”l, in *Shaalos U'Teshuvos Tzemach Tzedek* (Yoreh Deah, sec. 93), where he explains at length and with great profundity the halachic prohibition of cutting the beard with scissors... Concerning those who dispute the halachic position of the Tzemach Tzedek by maintaining that surely it was not meant as a halachic ruling... What can I do if he does not realize who is the one stating this —the *Tzemach Tzedek* authored by the holy *gaon* of Lubavitch, zt”l, who was close to our generation (prince of the Torah, Torah leader of the Jewish people, grandson and disciple of the holy *gaon*, the Rov, author of the Tanya, zt”l)? ... Moreover, in the actual subject itself, [the disputant] is groping like a blind man at noon against the bright luminary of the sun — the words of the Tzemach Tzedek... He has certainly not seen *teshuvah* sec. 93 in the above-mentioned *Tzemach Tzedek*, which stretches over eight large folio

pages overflowing with halachic depth concerning the prohibition of cutting the beard — look it up there... The last disputant, with his words against the *Tzemach Tzedek* authored by the holy *gaon* of Lubavitch, zt”l... Trembling took hold of me that he has reviled the words of the Living G-d and the *gaon*, the pride and saint of the Jewish people, leader of all Jews in the Diaspora, zt”l... [The disputant] ought to grovel in the dust and beg for forgiveness, and then, after doing all that, perhaps [he will be forgiven]... Let us conclude with historical accounts of the righteous that we have heard and know, that the holy *gaon*, author of the *Tzemach Tzedek*, was ready to give up his life for this matter [maintaining a full beard] at the palace of Czar Nicholas I...” (*Shaalos U’Teshuvos Minchas Elozor*, vol. 2, sec. 48).

**THE SEPHARDIC POSKIM ALSO SUPPORTED
THE TZEMACH TZEDEK'S POSITION
REGARDING SHAVING THE BEARD**

The illustrious Sephardic *gaon* and *posek*, Rav Chaim Chizkiya Medini, author of the halachic encyclopedia *Sdei Chemed*, responded as follows to a Rov who questioned the reliability of the ruling of the Tzemach Tzedek regarding cutting the beard. [It should be noted that the *Sdei 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 he was certainly qualified to know whether the majority agreed or disagreed with the Tzemach Tzedek. Yet, in his rabbinic encyclopedia, *Sdei Chemed*, he wrote:]

“If [the authority who ruled leniently] had seen the lengthy exposition of the Tzemach Tzedek in the abovementioned responsum, he would have retracted his opinion regarding this issue and 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! The 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 has 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” (*Sdei Chemed, klalim, lamed*, sec. 116).

[For many additional quotations from Sephardic sages, see *The Beard in Jewish Law* (Ktav Publishing, 2010; 2018) Addendum V: The Rulings of Sephardic Rabbinic Authorities Regarding Grooming the Beard.]

ADDENDUM

ע"ד סמכות שיטת ה"אגרות משה" זצ"ל בענין מכונות גילוח

מכתב תשובה זו ה' למראה עיניו של
מרן הגאון רבי חיים קניבסקי שליט"א
וזה לשון תגובתו:

יפה כתיבת

"יפה כתיבת"

Rabbi Moshe Wiener
3001 West 37th Street
Brooklyn, NY 11224-1479

משה ניסן ווינער
מח"ס: • הדרת פנים זקן
• כבודה בת מלך

בס"ד. יום ראשון לסדר "והייתם נקיים מה' ומישראל", תש"ע
בתגובה על הופעת הס' "תספורת הזקן במספריים וסם" (ניו יארק, ה'תש"ע), קבלתי
מכתב "כרטיס" (בהעלם שם מחברו) בזה"ל:

"בס"ד. כבוד הרב ווינער נ"י, למה אתה משמיט כסדר דעתו של פוסק
הדור הגר"מ פיינשטיין זצ"ל שהתיר. האם אין בזה עיוות."

והנה במענה על דבריו [למען היות נקיים מה' ומישראל, ולזכות את הרבים]:

(א) "דיו לעבד שיהא כרבו" (ע"פ ברכות נח, ב). והלא הגר"מ פיינשטיין זצ"ל עצמו לא
העלה ההיתר שלו על הכתב **ובדוקא**, וטעמו ונימוקו עמו. וכמו שהעיד הרב מיכל זלמן
שורקין שליט"א בספרו מגד גבעות עולם, עמ' צו: "שמה שהגר"מ [פיינשטיין] זצ"ל לא
רצה לכתוב תשובה באגרות משה להתיר את השימוש במכונת גילוח, הוא מטעם שה'

סובר שהגם שאין כאן של השחתה, מ"מ צורת היהודי הוא רק בזקן!" ומה אכן נעני אבתרי?

(ב) בספר הנזכר ("תספורת הזקן במספריים וסם") לא השמיט דעת הגר"מ פיינשטיין זצ"ל. ואדרבה, האריך בעמ' 6 להביא דברי גדולי דורנו (כולל הגאון ה"סטייפלער" זצ"ל, הגאון בעל שו"ת באר משה זצ"ל, ולבח"ל - הגרי"ש אלישיב [שליט"א], הגאון בעל שו"ת שבט הלוי [שליט"א], הגר"מ שטרנבוך שליט"א ועוד) אודות "דעת גדול אחד להתיר". ורק היות שיש מהנ"ל שהביעו דעתם בחריפות וכו' נגד ההיתר שאומרים בשם הגר"מ פיינשטיין זצ"ל - הנה "כבוד וכו' הסתר דבר" (ע"פ משלי כה, ב), ולכן שמו של הגר"מ פיינשטיין זצ"ל לא נזכר בפירוש בספר הנ"ל. [ויש להעיר שגם גדולי הרבנים הנ"ל לא הזכירו דעת הגר"מ פיינשטיין זצ"ל בזה בספריהם (חוץ מהגר"מ שטרנבוך שליט"א) - כ"א רק במכתבים וכו'].

(ג) לא עלינו תלונותיכם, כ"א על כל גדולי הפוסקים שהאריכו בספריהם אודות דין מכוונות גילוח - ולא מצאו לנכון להזכיר שיטתו להקל של הגר"מ פיינשטיין זצ"ל (אולי מטעם שההיתר שאומרים בשמו - הוא בעצמו לא כתבו בכתב בתשובותיו בשו"ת אגרות משה, וכו"ל). וכן מצינו בשו"ת מנחת יצחק (ח"ד סקי"ג סק"ה) שכתב "וחזיתי בספרים של גדולי האחרונים בתקוה למצוא סמך למנהג העולם להקל, אבל לא רק **שלא מצאתי היתר**, אלא כתבו בפירוש להחמיר" - ולא הזכיר כלל דעתו הידוע של הגר"מ פיינשטיין זצ"ל. וכן בשו"ת שבט הלוי (ח"י חיו"ד סק"ו, ובעוד כו"כ מתשובותיו) העיד שכתבו "כו"כ גדולי הדורות **באין חולק** שזה תער ממש" - ושיטת הגר"מ פיינשטיין זצ"ל לא הזכיר כלל. וגם בתשובתו של הגרי"ש אלישיב [שליט"א] בנדו"ד (קובץ תשובות סל"ב) לא נזכר שיש שיטת הגר"מ פיינשטיין זצ"ל המיקל בנדון. גם הגר"ח קניבסקי שליט"א שהאריך נגד גילוח הזקן במספריים, בסם ובמכוונות גילוח בספרו אורחות יושר ס"ה - ולא הזכיר בשם הגר"מ פיינשטיין זצ"ל להקל. ואדרבה - במכתבו הנדפס בס' הנ"ל (עמ' 4) כתב הגר"ח קניבסקי שליט"א "החזון איש אסר כל מכוונה וכו"כ **כל גדולי הדור**" - ולא מצא לנכון להזכיר שיש יוצא מהכלל בשם הגר"מ פיינשטיין זצ"ל. וכן בפסק דין (מחודש ניסן, תשס"ח) שחתמו עליו גדולי דורנו [שליט"א] (כולל הגרי"ש אלישיב, הגרא"ל שטיינמן, הגר"ש הלוי ואזנר, הגרמ"י לפקוביץ, הגר"נ קרליץ, הגר"ח קניבסקי, הגר"ש אויערבאך, הגר"ר נתן צבי פינקל ועוד יותר מעשרים ראשי ישיבות) אודות "פירצת מכוונות הגילוח, אשר **אסרוהו רבותינו גדולי הדור**" - ולא הזכירו דעת הגר"מ פיינשטיין זצ"ל כלל.

[ויש להעיר גם מתשובת הגאון רבי יעקב קמנצקי זצ"ל (שבודאי הי' ידוע לו שיטת הגר"מ פיינשטיין זצ"ל בנדון) בספרו אמת ליעקב (על ד"ח שו"ע - יו"ד סקפ"א ס"י - התשובה נכתבה לא' מנכדיו שליט"א): "ע"ד המכוונה גילוח, אין זו חומרא בעלמא. . **ובאמת לא אדע אם גדולי אמריקא התירו להדיא**, ויתכן ששתקו מפני שלא שאלום, והיו כמעלימים בידעם שלא יתקבלו דבריהם".]

ונסיים מענינא דיומא שי"ל שמבואר בחז"ל שכבר בזמן חורבן בית מקדשנו מסרו נפשם ע"ז, עי' יפה ענף לאיכ"ר ה, ה: "אולי גזר כי יגלחו שערם ולא ימצאו להם פאת ראש וזקן והמה לא שמעו בקולו והקשו עורף ולז"א על צוארנו נרדפנו". [ולא הסירו זקנם ע"י מספריים כעין תער או ע"י סם].

בכבוד ובהוקרה,

משה ניסן ווינער

נב. בכללות ענין הסתמכות על גדול הדור המיקל לעומת רוב פוסקים המחמירים, יש להעיר מדברי הגאון רבי ישראל סאלאנטער זצ"ל (בהקדמת ס' אור היום בענין בין השמשות - ווילנא, תרס"א), שאפילו את"ל שיש לאחוז כשיטת גדול הדור המיקל "נגד כל הפוסקים האחרים לפי שהוא ראוי לדחות את כולם" (ע"ש שכוונתו על שיטת הגר"א בענין בין השמשות), הנה מ"מ - "מי שאוחז את קולותיו מחוייב לאחוז [גם] את חומרותיו". [ועי' אג"מ או"ח ח"ב סימן ס שאין לנהוג כמו הגר"א כשהוא נגד רוב הראשונים אלא מי שנוהג כמותו בכל דבר].

הוספה לאחר זמן: לאחרונה י"ל שו"ת שבט הלוי חי"א ושם בחי"ד ס' קצח: "בענין מכונת גילוח . . . הנה מוסכם בפי כל גאוני עולם מאז . . . אין בינו לבין תער הנקרא תער ולא כלום . . . וגם הגאון איגרות משה שרצה להקל במכונה דעכשיו . . . המציא סברא . . . וסברא זו אינה נכונה ולא נתקבלה". "וכן לא קבלוהו הרבה גדולי עולם ... וכן שמעתי בעצמי מהגאון ר' שלמה זלמן אויערבאך זצ"ל שתמה מאוד על שהוצע הצד הזה" (הרה"ג ר' פסח אליהו פאלק, מח"ס שו"ת מחזה אליהו, בקובץ "עם התורה" מהדורא ה' חוברת ט' תשע"ח - י"ל ע"י צעירי אגודת ישראל ארה"ב). ועד"ז כתב בשו"ת תשובות והנהגות ח"ה סרס"ד: "בשם הגרמ"פ זצ"ל. גוף הסברא להתיר אינה מוכרחת וקשה להקל באיסור תורה. ונראה למעשה, שאין להתגלח במכונה, שראוי לחשוש בחשש דאורייתא על עשרה לאוין."

לע"נ

אדוני אבי היקר באנשים

אוהב ואהוב על הבריות

מוכתר במעלות ובמידות תרומיות

רודף צדקה וחסד

ר' זאב וואלף ב"ר יצחק ע"ה

ווינער

נלב"ע ש"ק פ' יתרו, כ' שבט תשע"ז

תנצב"ה

The Chofetz Chaim zt'l

regarding

The Beard and Shaving

“מצוה רבה לכלל ישראל להתחזק בזה ושלא להקטין הזקן אפילו במספריים”
(קונטרס תפארת אדם למרן החפץ חיים זצ”ל בהקדמה)

“It is a great mitzvah for the entire Jewish people to reinforce this observance and to refrain from trimming the beard even with scissors”
(the Chofetz Chaim zt'l in the beginning of his Kuntres Tiferes Odom)



“כמה תוכחות הוכיח אבא בזה, בעל פה, ובכתב, ובדפוס, על עניני גילוח הזקן,
שנה אחר שנה”

(בנו של מרן החפץ חיים זצ”ל ב”תולדות ימי חייו בקיצור”, נדפס בהקדמת ס' מכתבי חפץ חיים עמ' 57)

“Year after year my father admonished [people] regarding shaving the beard, both orally, in writing, and in his publications”

(the son of the Chofetz Chaim in his biography of his father, published in his introduction to Michtevi Chofetz Chaim, p. 57)



“הנה המאשינקע (המכונה) אשר המציאו בימי הח”ח כמלפני מאה שנה אינו
בבואה דבבואה להמכונות המשוכללות שבזמנינו..הרי הוא נלכד באיסור
תורה ממש”

(הגר”ש אלישיב זצ”ל בספרו “קובץ תשובות” ח”א סל”ב)

“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 Yosef Sholom Elyashiv zt'l, in his sefer Kovetz Teshuvos vol. 1, sec. 32)

