

Finger Painting

November 30, 2023

Q I was painting on Friday. I cleaned the paint from my hands, but I see now that a tiny spot remains on one fingernail. Does that pose a problem for *netilas yadayim*? If so, what can I do about it on Shabbos?



A Just as one who is *toveil* in a mikveh may not have a *chatzitzah* (blockage) between his body and the water, a person washing *netilas yadayim* may not have a *chatzitzah* between his hands and the water (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 161:1). The Mishnah Brurah (161:1) writes that one should check his hands for *chatzitzos* before washing. But if a *chatzitzah* on one's hand is *miut she'eino makpid* (it covers only a minority of the surface area of his hand, he doesn't mind its presence, and neither would most people), it doesn't pose a problem. Although for *tvilah*, we *lechat'chilah* (a priori) remove even a *chatzitzah* that is *miut she'eino makpid*, for *netilas yadayim* this isn't necessary (Shulchan Aruch *ibid.*).

Most people probably wouldn't care about a tiny spot of paint on a fingernail. But even if most people aren't *makpid* about a particular kind of *chatzitzah*, the Mishnah Brurah (161:10) maintains that if the bearer himself minds, it is a *chatzitzah* for him.

If it's unclear whether the bearer is *makpid* or not, and he can't remove it because it's Shabbos, there is room to be lenient with *netilas yadayim* on two bases:

- The Shulchan Aruch Harav argues on the Mishnah Brurah and maintains that for *netilas yadayim*, if the bearer is bothered by the *chatzitzah* but most people wouldn't be, it's not a *chatzitzah*.
- The Eishel Avraham (Butchatch) says that when one cannot remove a *chatzitzah* because of Shabbos, he is considered not to be *makpid* on it. In this he disagrees with the Mishnah Brurah (340:3).

If one has a *chatzitzah* that cannot be removed on Shabbos, he may eat bread by wearing a glove on that hand.