

Taking a hair cut and shaving during sefira

1. In commemoration of the death of the students of Rabbi Akiva, the minhag is not to cut one's hair during sefira. Although many minhagim exist, the common minhag is that Sephardim don't cut their hair until the 34th day of sefira in the morning and Ashkenazim don't cut their hair until the 33rd in the morning.¹
2. Not shaving is included in the minhag not to take haircuts.² Some poskim say that there is a firm basis to permit a person who shaves daily to shave during sefira after not shaving for a few days after Pesach.³
3. Although some permit cutting one's hair on Fridays for Kavod Shabbat, on Rosh Chodesh for Kavod Rosh Chodesh, and prior to Yom HaAtzmaut, each of these opinions is questionable.⁴
4. Many permit shaving if not shaving will cause one a loss of income; however, each case should be judged individually.⁵

1. The Gemara Yevamot 62b records the tragic story of Rabbi Akiva's student passing away between Pesach and Shavuot. The Tur 493:2 records the minhag not to take haircuts during sefira in order to mourn the death of Rabbi Akiva's students. The Tur writes that some cut their hair from Lag BaOmer and on because there's a tradition that the students of Rabbi Akiva stopped dying on Lag BaOmer. The Tashbetz 1:178, however, says that they stopped dying on the 34th. S"A 493:2 follows the Tashbetz, while the Rama quotes some who follow the Tur and some who don't take a hair cut from Rosh Chodesh Iyar until Shavuot.

Kaf HaChaim 493:12 and Chazon Ovadyah (p. 253) agree that Sephardic minhag is not to cut one's hair until the morning of the 34th, following the S"A. Kaf HaChaim 493:13 adds that some follow the Arizal's practice not to cut their hair for the entire sefira.

Although the Mishna Brurah 493:15 records the Ashkenazic minhag to mourn from the first day of Rosh Chodesh Iyar until the Sheloshet Yemei Hagbala, Peninei Halacha (Hilchos Sefirat HaOmer) writes that nowadays, the common Ashkenazic minhag is like the Rama to mourn from the beginning of the Omer until Lag BaOmer in the morning.

Mishna Brurah 493:6 and 10 explains that one may only cut one's hair starting from the 33rd or 34th, for Ashkenazim or Sephardim respectively, in the morning because Miktzat HaYom KeKulo operates only from daybreak.

2. Nitai Gavriel (Pesach vol 3 49:2), Chazon Ovadyah (p. 262)
3. Rav Soloveitchik (cited by Rav Schachter in Nefesh HaRav p. 191-2) compared the sefira to the 12 months of mourning for a parent during which a person who shaves daily may shave after waiting a few days. Rav Schachter ("Halachos of Chol HaMoed," min 67-70) clarified that not shaving for 3 or 5 days is sufficient. Rabbi Willig ("Hilchos Pesach and Sefira#1," min 85-90) also quoted this ruling of Rav Soloveitchik.
4. Bet Yosef 493:3 writes that those who cut their hair on Rosh Chodesh Iyar because they consider it a Yom Tov are mistaken because the minhag is not to cut hair on Rosh Chodesh Iyar. He adds that they may have mistakenly thought it was permitted based on another minhag that would mourn another 33 days during sefira. However, the Radvaz 2:687 permits cutting one's hair on Rosh Chodesh Iyar if not doing so causes pain since the

practices of sefira is only a minhag. Chida in Yosef Ometz 40:2 and Kaf HaChaim 493:40 write that some rely on this.

The Bach 493 quotes the Minhagim, who says that it's permitted to get married on Rosh Chodesh Iyar if it falls out on Shabbat and explains that the combination of the kedusha of Rosh Chodesh and Shabbat override the mourning of sefira. Regarding this Bach, the Pri Chadash 493:3 writes that the same is true for haircuts. Kitzur S"A 120:6, S"A HaRav 493:8, and Mishna Brurah 493:5 agree. The Bach seems to hold that Rosh Chodesh alone isn't enough to permit cutting one's hair.

It also seems that the Bach wouldn't permit cutting one's hair because of Kavod Shabbat alone. Thus, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky (Emet L'Yaakov 493 note 467) and Rav Shlomo Zalman (Shalmei Moed p. 449) hold that one may not shave during sefira for Kavod Shabbat. However, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein (vbm.com) ruled that it's an obligation to shave for Shabbat during sefira just like Kavod Shabbat theoretically overrides the nine days (see Mishna Brurah 551:32). Chazon Ovadyah (p. 262) is lenient if one is in great pain.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed (Peninei Halacha "Yom HaAtzmaut") writes that those who shave regularly should shave prior to Yom HaAtzmaut in order to look presentable for the holiday. He also quotes Rav Yitzchak Nissim and Rav Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook who agreed. However, Yaskil Avdi 6:10 forbids shaving in honor of Yom HaAtzmaut.

5. Rav Moshe in Igrot Moshe 4:102 rules that if one will lose money by not shaving, one may shave during sefira, because the minhag never applied in a case of monetary loss. In 5:24(9), he explains his position and says that only a person who is concerned about losing his income for the duration of the sefira is permitted to shave. If, however, he can simply borrow money and then repay it with later income, this leniency wouldn't apply. See Maadanei Shlomo (p. 54) who quotes Rav Shlomo Zalman as also being lenient.

Similarly, Sh"t Zera Emet 69 writes that for parnasa it is permitted, but each case should be judged independently. Chida in Machzik Bracha 493:4, Kaf Hachaim 493:19, Sh"t Yaskil Avdi 6:5, and Nitai Gavriel (49:8) agree. See Piskei Shemuot (p. 62) who quotes Rav Elyashiv as saying that one may not shave parnasa because it's not considered strange to go unshaven.