

Shoel U'Mashiv

A Haircut During Sefirah?!

Rabbi Noah Whittenburg

Q - “Life was a little hectic before *Pesach* and I forgot to get a haircut. Now my hair is getting out of control and it’s really starting to bother me. Is there any way for me to get a haircut during *Sefirah*?”

A - Why don’t we get haircuts during *Sefirah*?

The *Aruch HaShulchan O.C.* 493:1 explains that the days between *Pesach* and *Shavuous* are days of judgment and mourning because it was during this time period that the 12,000 pairs of students of *Rebbe Akiva* passed away. Therefore, we adopt some of the customs of mourners at this time. The *Shulchan Aruch O.C.* 493:1 says not to get married and in 493:2 he says not to get a haircut.

When is a person allowed to get a haircut?

There are multiple customs for when to observe *Sefirah* and the customs of mourning. The *Shulchan Aruch O.C.* 493:2 says it is the first 33 days from *Pesach* until *Lag B’Omer*. The *Rema* 493:3 says many observe from *Rosh Chodesh Iyar* until *Shavuous*. The *Mishnah Berurah* 493:15 says that some observe the customs of mourning from after *Pesach* all the way until *Shavuous*, except on *Rosh Chodesh Iyar*, *Lag B’Omer* and *Rosh Chodesh Sivan*. The *Shaarei Teshuva* 493:8 even quotes the *Arizal* who says not to cut one’s hair for the entire duration of *Sefirah*—starting *Erev Pesach* and ending *Erev Shavuous*.

Rav Moshe in *Igros Moshe O.C.* 2:95 said that a person can change their custom from year to year. The *Piskei Teshuvos* 493:13 also says one is able to do so. Rabbi Mordechai Willig told me that he didn’t think a person should change their custom, just like we say not to do so for any other custom. But he acknowledged that his opinion is contrary to the common practice.

Is there any way for our friend to get a haircut?

The only question left unanswered is whether a person can change their custom while *Sefirah* is happening or whether they can only do so prior to *Sefirah* beginning? I realized that in this case changing customs would be more of a stringency than a leniency because he would end up observing the customs of mourning for more than the minimum 33 days. Therefore, I told him that if he wanted a haircut, he could change his custom. Meaning, he could get one before *Rosh Chodesh Iyar*, then again on *Lag B’Omer* and again on *Erev Shavuous*, but not during the days in between.