



Knot on Shabbos: Introduction to *Meleches Kosheir* (Part 2)

{Editor's Note: Last week's essay focused on defining the Melacha of Kosheir and permanent knots. The essay is available online at <https://www.medicalhalacha.org/torah-archive> or by clicking [here](#). This week we will continue to define the Melacha and other types of knots.}

Knots That Remain In Place Until They Wear Out

The *Orchos Chaim* (Shabbos 106) rules that it is an *Issur d'Rabbanan* to create a *Kesher* which might remain in place permanently. He provides the example of a belt knotted to a pair of linen pants that can be laundered together with the pants. Since it is possible that the belt will remain forever knotted to the pants, one may not tie it on Shabbos. Although the knot was not intended to be permanent, it is *Assur mid'Rabbanan* to tie such knots on Shabbos since it may ultimately remain permanently. He adds that this is why the Gemara forbids knotting a strap to a camel's nose ring. Though the intention is not for the knot to remain permanently in place, it is *Assur mid'Rabbanan* since it may be left there indefinitely.

The *Sha'ar haTzion* emphasizes that if a person ties a belt to a pair of pants with the intention that it remain in place until the belt wears out, he has only violated an *Issur d'Rabbanan*. However, Rav Nissim Karelitz (*Chut Shani*) derived from the ruling of the *Orchos Chaim* that if a person forms a knot with the intention that it remain in place until the rope or belt wears out, it is considered a *Kesher Shel Kayama*. In the case discussed by the *Orchos Chaim*, the person will continue to use the pants (but will discard the worn-out belt) yet the *Orchos Chaim* considered the knot that held them together to be a *Kesher Shel Kayama*. This proves that even if a knot will wear away, it can still be considered a *Kesher Shel Kayama* if there's no intention to untie it. In fact, this ruling formed the basis of Rav Karelitz' conclusion that absorbable stitches are considered a *Kesher Shel Kayama*!



The *Magid Mishna* (*Hilchos Shabbos* 10:3) seems to support the opinion of Rav Karelitz. The *Ra'avad* (*ibid.*) rules that a knot made in a reed cannot be considered a *Kesher Shel Kayama*, but the *Magid Mishna* disagrees:

That which [the Ra'avad] wrote that this isn't considered a permanent [knot] as it is made in a rope made out of reed, is also astounding. A Kesher Shel Kayama is not defined by the quality of the rope but by the essence of the knot and the purpose for which it is tied. According to him, a Kesher Shel Kayama could only be formed in a strong material that will last for a very long time.

The *Shulchan Aruch haRav* (*O.C.* 317:1) also implies that if a knot will remain in place until it is worn out then it is considered a *Kesher Shel Kayama*:

*By Torah law, one is only liable for a Kesher Shel Kayama that stands to remain in place indefinitely. **This means that it was tied with the intention to remain for as long as possible**, and for as long as he doesn't need to untie it. Even though it is possible that he will need to untie it in the short term, nevertheless, since when he tied it he did not set a time when he would untie it, and it was possible for it to have been tied permanently, it is considered a Kesher Shel Kayama and one is liable for tying and untying it.*

One could however draw a different conclusion from *Rashi* (*Shabbos* 157b) who explains that one may tie a shoe with a moist reed on Shabbos because it will come apart when it dries out. This implies that a knot that will come apart of its own accord due to the flimsiness of the material is not a *Kesher Shel Kayama*.

However, we could distinguish between the above cases based on the duration of the knot's "lifetime". A *Kesher* is only considered to be permanent if it will last for a significant length of time, but not when it is made of a substance that will quickly fall apart on its own. Therefore, an absorbable suture would not be considered a *Kesher Shel Kayama*. The *Sefer Halichos Shabbos* (*Melech Kosheir* 17) also comes to the same conclusion.

A Firm Knot that will be Promptly Untied

The *Acharonim* discuss whether it is permissible to make a knot on Shabbos with the intention to untie it right away. Rabbi Akiva Eger (*Hagahos on Shulchan Aruch O.C.* 317) asks why the Gemara does not suggest that a person who finds



Tefillin on Shabbos should tie them with the intention that he will untie them on *Motzaei Shabbos*, which implies that doing so would be permissible. However, the *Biur Halacha* (*ibid.*) writes that any knot that is typically tied permanently is considered a *Kesher Shel Kayama*, even if it is tied with the intention to untie it after a short period. A *Kesher Shel Kayama* is defined solely by the type of knot and its properties – not the intention of the one who ties it.

The *Beis Meir* takes this a step further. He rules that a knot can only be considered temporary if there is an obvious reason that it will not remain tied permanently. However, if there is no strong indication that the knot is only intended to be temporary, it would be considered permanent regardless of the intention of the one who tied it. The same applies to a knot that will remain in place for an intermediate amount of time (in other words, a knot that is an *Issur d'Rabbanan*); the intention to untie it sooner, or even immediately, makes no difference whatsoever.

However, the *Biur Halacha* rules more leniently in the case of an intermediate knot. If circumstances do not indicate when the knot will be untied and it is unclear for how long the knot is to remain in place, we can take the person's intentions into account and be lenient if he intends to untie it after a short period of time. Nevertheless, the *Biur Halacha* recommends that we should be concerned for the view of the *Yere'im* who prohibits this due to the concern that he will change his mind and leave the knot in place for longer.

In this regard, Rav Yitzchak Mordechai Rubin *Shlit"a* (*Orchos Shabbos* 10:16) adduces a proof from the Gemara (*Shabbos* 112a) which relates that R' Yehuda and his son would wear the same pair of shoes over Shabbos, each tying a new knot when it was their turn to wear it (and untying it when they removed the shoes). Though people usually leave these types of shoelace knots in place for longer, they had a specific reason and deliberate practice to untie the knot sooner and it was therefore considered to be temporary.

A Kesher with an Unclear Lifespan

In some cases it is unclear how long a knot will remain in place. For example, hospital identification bracelets¹ may sometimes be removed very quickly if the

¹ These bands are not actually tied, but the ends are attached around the patient's wrist or ankle by either a plastic snap that is not easily undone or by a single-use adhesive.



patient is discharged immediately, but if the patient is admitted for a longer period (i.e. longer than a week), the *Kesher* would be considered to be semi-permanent and an *Issur d'Rabbanan*.

According to the *Beis Meir*, attaching these identification bracelets on Shabbos would likely be prohibited as there is no definite indication or cause to believe that they will be removed within the week. On the other hand, perhaps even the *Beis Meir* would permit placing these bands on Shabbos since no one wears these bands permanently (as everybody removes them when they leave the hospital). One could also argue that the *Biur Halacha* might also permit attaching bracelets like these, as he seems to be referring to a knot that is generally tied for a long period of time, but in this type of attachment (that is typically removed after a relatively shorter duration) he might be lenient.

It is clear from the Gemara that a knot that is not intended to remain in place permanently, even though it may ultimately be left in place, is not considered a *Kesher*. Therefore, the Gemara (*Shabbos 112a*) states that a woman may fasten or unfasten a robe that is knotted on two sides *Lechatchila*, even though it can be removed by untying just one side and the other side may remain knotted together even for an extended period or permanently.

On the other hand, *Rashi* explains that tying semi-permanent knots is an *Issur d'Rabbanan* because they are sometimes left in place for a week or two. This implies that a knot is forbidden if it may be left in place, even if it is not certain to be.

Likewise, the *Ra'avad (ibid.)* explains that the *Chachamim* did not permit tying a weaver's rope to a bucket since one is likely to leave it there for a day or two. They only permitted tying a cow to prevent it from escaping because a person is unlikely to leave the rope tied for a prolonged period as the cow is likely to tear it free if it is left in place for too long. This indicates that it is prohibited to tie a knot that will not be untied that same day according to the *Ra'avad*.

The *Shulchan Aruch haRav* makes the following conclusions:

...If they do not have specific intentions when they tie the knot and tie it without any plan in mind ("Stam"), it is permissible to tie it on Shabbos. Even if they do not ultimately untie it that night and leave it there for an extended period, this



does not render it a Keshel Shel Kayama since at the time it was tied it was not certain that it would not be untied on Motzaei Shabbos. For occasionally [even] Talmidei Chachamim will untie their shoes at night before they go to sleep.² It is similarly permissible for to untie shoelaces on Shabbos if they were originally tied "Stam", even if they tied them a long time before Shabbos and the laces had not been untied in the interim.

It would seem that according to the *Shulchan Aruch haRav*, any semi-permanent knot which may be untied after a short time, is not considered a *Keshel Shel Kayama* and is permissible to tie on Shabbos. However, if a knot is likely to remain in place indefinitely and there is no certain reason that it will be untied, tying it is an *Issur d'Oraisa* even though it is possible that he will untie it.

Rav Rubin (*Orchos Shabbos ibid.*) does not permit this due to aforementioned proof from *Rashi*.

The View of the *Rambam*

We previously explained (see last week's essay) that the view of the *Rambam* is that a knot is only considered a *Keshel Shel Kayama* if it is both a *Keshel Uman* (an expertly-tied knot, such as those made by sailors) and is permanent. An impermanent *Keshel Uman* or a permanent, non-expert knot is only an *Issur d'Rabbanan*.

Generally, there is no condition that *Melachos* need to be the work of an *Uman*.³ Why did the *Rambam* require this condition for *Melech Kosheir*?

² [Editor's note: This refers to the Gemara in Shabbos (112a) that describes the knots tied in the shoes of the "Rabbanan" as *Patur Aval Assur* (i.e. *mid'Rabbanan*). *Rashi* explains that they would not tie their shoes tightly in order to be able to quickly remove or put on their shoes (and not lose time from their Torah studies), yet these were not considered *Keshel Shel Kayama* since they would untie and retie their shoes tightly during the rainy season so that the shoes would not get stuck in the mud and pulled from their feet. The *Shulchan Aruch haRav* likely means that even the *Talmidei Chachamim* who generally do not untie their shoes before removing them will do so occasionally, so a knot that is tied *Stam* cannot be certainly considered as if it was intended not to be untied on *Motzaei Shabbos*.]

³ For example, one is liable for *Melech Kosev* for writing in a regular, non-expert fashion. It is only with regard to the Halachos of Chol haMoed that a distinction is drawn between writing in an expert manner ("*Ma'ase Uman*") and a non-expert manner ("*Ma'ase Hedyot*").



What constitutes a *Kesher Uman*? There are two views among the Poskim:

1. The *Aruch haShulchan* (O.C. 317) notes that the example cited by the *Rambam* of a *Kesher Uman* is the knot that is made by shoemakers. These knots required a level of craftsmanship that a layman does not possess. Therefore, tying one's shoelaces cannot be considered a *Kesher Uman* even if the knot is somewhat intricate. Likewise, any knot that a layman could tie cannot possibly be a *Kesher Uman*. It is likely that this is because a knot that can be tied by a layman can only be considered a form of routine "*Shimush*" and not a creative activity that could be deemed a *Melacha*.

2. The *Shiltei Giborim* disagrees. He rules that the definition of a *Kesher Uman* is a strong, effective knot that cannot easily be untied. Therefore, a simple double knot is considered a *Kesher Uman*. The *Rema* adds that a single knot in a single string is similarly prohibited since it is also strong and effective.

According to the *Rambam*, there is a leniency in the *Issur d'Oraisa* of *Meleches Kosheir* in that one is only liable for a *Kesher Uman*. On the other hand, there is a stringency in the *Issur d'Rabbanan* in that it is prohibited to create a *Kesher Uman* even if it will only last for a short time. This is particularly important in light of the view of the *Shiltei Giborim*, as in his view, it would be prohibited *mid'Rabbanan* to create a double knot in all cases, even if it will only be temporary.

The *Rambam* (*Hilchos Shabbos 10:4*) rules that it is permissible to tie a knot in a material that is fit for an animal to eat:

Therefore, if a person's shoelace breaks in a Karmelis, he may take a moist reed that is fit for an animal to eat, fold it over the shoe and tie the reed.

The *Ramban* does not explain why tying a knot in a reed should not at least be an *Issur d'Rabbanan* given that it is unlikely to be temporary. However, in light of the above we may suggest that according to the *Rambam*, although it is prohibited to tie a permanent knot even if it isn't a *Kesher Uman*, it must be made in a material **in which it is possible to tie a *Kesher Uman***. Since it isn't possible to make a *Kesher Uman* with a moist reed, there is no *Issur* to make any sort of knot, even if it will be long-lasting.⁴

⁴ See also the *Mishna Berura* 324:12



The *Rambam* does not define the length of time that would be considered a semi-permanent knot. In fact, it is possible that he holds that there is no intermediate stage and that, just like all of the other *Melachos*, if the effects last for a significant amount of time, it is prohibited. Or perhaps the reverse is true and any knot that isn't permanent would not be considered a *Melacha* at all. If so, an impermanent knot that is not a *Kesher Uman* would in fact be permissible.

[On the other hand, this approach could also result in a stringency, for a knot that will last for a long time would be an *Issur d'Oraisa* even if it isn't permanent. According to the *Rambam*, the significance of a *Kesher* arises from its being a *Kesher Uman* and not necessarily its intended or expected duration.]

A Strong Knot and the *Shiltei Giborim*

The *Shiltei Giborim* (*Shabbos* 41a *b'Dafei haRif*) contends that we are no longer familiar with a *Kesher Uman* and must therefore be concerned that any strong knot constitutes a *Kesher Uman*. This is because a *Kesher Uman* is defined not by the expertise required in its formation but in the difficulty in untying it. This is also the understanding of the *Taz* (*O.C.* 317:1).

The *Rema* cites the stringency of the *Shiltei Giborim* and also adds that the *Semag* forbids even making a single knot in a single string as it is also a strong and effective knot.

However, according to the *Shiltei Giborim* and *Semag*, it is difficult to understand the distinction that *Chaza"l* made between a knot that will remain in place for a short time and one that will remain in place for longer. Tying a bow is not a *Kesher* at all, and a double knot is a possible *Kesher Uman* and forbidden regardless of the duration that it will be tied.

There are those who answer that *Chaza"l* were referring to a loose double knot. Since it is loose, it is certainly not a *Kesher Uman* but is still forbidden if it will remain in place for some time. Others suggest that they referred to a knot that is made on top of a bow, which according to some is forbidden if it will remain in place permanently.



The *Rema* rules that in cases of distress, one may untie a double knot on Shabbos and the *Acharonim* disagree as to his rationale. The *Gra* explains that it is allowed because *Issurim d'Rabbanan* may be violated in cases of distress. However, the *Tehila l'Dovid*⁵ contends that this is not the intention of the *Rema* in this case (though it is essentially a correct conclusion). Rather, the *Rema* permits untying a double knot because the opinion of the *Shiltei Giborim* is only a *Chumra* (a stringency), and one needn't be concerned for *Chumros* even in cases of only mild distress.

The *Chazon Ish* (O.C. 52:17) similarly contends that the position of the *Shiltei Giborim* is only a *Chumra*. Therefore, one may be lenient and permit untying an existing double knot in any case it is causing a person distress.

⁵ R' Dovid Ortenberg (d. 1910) of Berditchev.