

In Hilchos Shabbos

You have heard the shaylos . . .
Now learn the issues & the opinions

Watches

Part I:

Wearing Watches in Reshus Ha'Rabim

A summary of the weekly Wednesday night shiur by Rabbi Shmuel Stein at the Miami Beach Community Kollel / To receive a copy send an email to InHilchosShabbos@gmail.com

Wearing a wristwatch on Shabbos introduces a number of different halachic questions.¹ In this part, we will discuss whether it is permitted to wear a wristwatch in *Reshus Ha'rabim* on Shabbos.

Wearing a wristwatch in Reshus Ha'rabim

The *poskim* discuss whether it is permissible to wear a wristwatch in *Reshus Ha'rabim* (a public domain) on Shabbos in an area which does not have a reliable *eiruv*.²

The Melacha of Hotza

One of the thirty-nine *melachos* of Shabbos is the *melacha* of *Hotza*.³ The *melacha* of *Hotza* can be defined as transferring an object from one domain to another. For example, one may not carry a *siddur* from his home into the street to bring to shul, because transferring the object from his home (a private domain) to the street (a public domain) violates the *melacha* of *Hotza*.

The Severity of the melacha of Hotza

The *melacha* of *Hotza* is the *melacha* which is the most extensively discussed in the Gemara.⁴ Although carrying an object outdoors may seem like a trivial act, we find a level of severity that is associated to the *melacha* of *Hotza* which is not found by any of the other *melachos* of Shabbos.⁵ For example, violating the *melacha* of *Hotza* is capable of destroying the Bais Hamikdash, as the *Navi Yermiah*⁶ states, "So says Hashem: If they disgrace the day of Shabbos day by carrying a load, I will ignite a fire which will consume the palaces of *Yerushalayim* that will never be extinguished."

The halachos of Malbush and Tachshit: Wearing Clothing and Jewelry

The *Navi* describes the *melacha* of *Hotza* as "carrying a load" [in a *Reshus Ha'rabim*]. The *Aruch Ha'Shulchan*⁷ writes that "we must clearly define which objects are included in the prohibition of "carrying a load." This is especially important since the *melacha* of *Hotza* is considered a serious prohibition. We find that there are two categories of objects which are not included in the prohibition of "carrying a load" and may be transferred on Shabbos: wearing clothing and wearing jewelry."

1) Malbush- Clothing

When one wears clothing it is not considered as if he is "carrying a load" and does not violate the *melacha* of *Hotza*. The *Aruch Ha'Shulchan*⁸ writes that "it is obvious that the Torah did not consider wearing clothing to be considered 'carrying a load,' because the Torah did not intend for people to walk outside undressed." The

Rambam⁹ explains that when one wears clothing it becomes subordinate to one's body, and therefore we do not consider the person to be "carrying a load," since we view the clothing as part of one's body. Accordingly,

- On Shabbos, one may wear a jacket, hat or any other garment that is worn (so long as they are worn in a regular manner¹⁰).
- On Shabbos, one may wear his *tallis* home from shul.¹²

2) Tachshit- Jewelry

The *Aruch Ha'Shulchan*¹³ writes that "we also cannot consider wearing jewelry to be considered 'carrying a load' and does not violate the *melacha* of *Hotza*." Here too, the Rambam¹⁴ explains that [because jewelry is used to service one's body] the jewelry one wears is subordinate to his body, and therefore is not considered an act of 'carrying a load.' Therefore, wearing jewelry outside does not violate the *melacha* d'Oraisa of *Hotza*.

The Rabbinical prohibition against wearing jewelry on Shabbos

The Mishna¹⁵ writes that a woman may not wear jewelry outside [in a *Reshus Ha'rabim* which does not have a proper *eiruv*] on Shabbos. The Gemara¹⁶ explains that although on *mid'Oraisa* it is permissible to wear jewelry outside, *Chazal* were concerned that if a woman would wear jewelry outside, upon meeting a friend she may remove her jewelry to show it to her friend and inadvertently continue to carry the jewelry in her hand and violate the *melacha* of *Hotza*. Therefore, *Chazal* prohibited wearing jewelry in a *Reshus Ha'rabim* on Shabbos. The *Aruch Ha'Shulchan*¹⁷ explains that "*Chazal* were so concerned about someone inadvertently carrying on Shabbos, because firstly, the *melacha* of *Hotza* is considered a serious prohibition, and secondly, people are used to carrying during the week and it is thus common for someone to inadvertently carry on Shabbos. Therefore, *Chazal* prohibited wearing jewelry outdoors on Shabbos to prevent someone from removing their jewelry and inadvertently carrying it on Shabbos."

The Question of the Shulchan Aruch: "So why do women wear jewelry nowadays?"

The *Shulchan Aruch*¹⁸ wonders, if it is indeed rabbinically prohibited to wear jewelry outdoors on Shabbos, why is it that women nowadays wear jewelry outdoors on Shabbos (in areas which do not have an *eiruv*), and we do not find that anyone protests this?

The *Rema*¹⁹ answers this question as follows: "In the times of the

1 It is known that Reb Chaim Kanievsky *zatzal* would instruct men to remove their wristwatches as he ruled that it is forbidden for men to wear wristwatches even during the week, because it is considered a *begged isha*, a women's attire. Interestingly, the production of wristwatches dates to the 16th century and initially, wristwatches were intended only for women, as they were affixed to a bracelet, while men wore pocket watches. It was only in the early 20th century that men too began wearing wristwatches. However, most *poskim* seem to hold that in general there is no issue with a man wearing a watch. See *Avnei Yashfei* 4, Y.D. 90:4 regarding whether a man wearing a woman's wristwatch violates the prohibition of wearing a *begged isha*. 2 See Chapter on the Making of an Eiruv 3 Mishna *Shabbos* 73a 4 The 39 *Melochos* p.1284 (note 41) citing Rav Yisroel Belsky 5 See *Shulchan Ha'Levi* pp. 109-110 where Rav Yisroel Belsky elaborates on the severity of the *melacha* of *Hotza*. 6 *Yermiyah* 17:27 7 301:48 8 301:48 9 *Shabbos* 18:17; see also Rashi (*Shabbos* 142b d"h *patur*) 10 See Chapter on Wearing Masks on Shabbos 11 See *Orchos Shabbos* 28:117 12 *Orchos Shabbos* 28:162 13 301:49 14 *Shabbos* 18:17; see also Rashi (*Shabbos* 142b d"h *patur*) 15 *Shabbos* 57a (*Shulchan Aruch* 303:7) 16 *Shabbos* 59b see Rashi *Shabbos* 57a d"h b'mah 17 301:49 18 303:18; see also *Aruch Ha'Shulchan* 303:21

Gemara it was uncommon for women to own pieces of jewelry, and it was thus unusual for women to wear jewelry outside during the week. Therefore, since it was uncommon for women to wear jewelry outside, Chazal were concerned that if a woman would wear jewelry outside on Shabbos, she may remove her jewelry to show her friend and inadvertently carry the jewelry in her hand. However, nowadays when it is common for women to own jewelry and wear it during the week as well and we therefore are no longer concerned that a woman will remove her jewelry to show her friend.” The *Aruch Ha’shluchan*²⁰ writes that “we observe this with our own eyes, as women nowadays do not remove their jewelry in *Reshus Ha’rabim* to show their friends, and therefore the concern of Chazal no longer applies. Hence, the answer of the Rema is a clear reason to permit wearing jewelry outdoors on Shabbos nowadays.”

Wearing a Wristwatch Outside on Shabbos

We discussed the two categories of objects which may be worn in *Reshus Ha’rabim*: Clothing and Jewelry. The *poskim* discuss how to categorize a wristwatch, is it considered a garment or a type of jewelry, in which case it may be worn outside on Shabbos, or perhaps since the primary function of a wristwatch is to tell the time perhaps it cannot be considered a garment or a type jewelry and thus may not be worn outside on Shabbos?

Three opinions regarding wearing a wristwatch in Reshus Ha’rabim:

We will discuss three opinions in the *poskim* regarding the status of a wristwatch and whether it may be worn in a *Reshus Ha’rabim* on Shabbos. One should consult his Rav for a final ruling on which opinion to follow.

1) The opinion of the Tzitz Eliezer: A wristwatch may not be worn outdoors on Shabbos

The Tzitz Eliezer²¹ rules that one may not wear any type of wristwatch in a *Reshus Ha’rabim* (which does not have a proper *eiruv*) on Shabbos. The Tzitz Eliezer argues that we cannot consider a wristwatch to be a garment or a piece of jewelry. A wristwatch cannot be considered a garment because it is not worn to protect one’s body like a garment is worn. It also cannot be considered jewelry, because the primary function of a wristwatch is to tell the time. Although many watches are designed to be decorative, since the *main purpose* of a wristwatch is for its decorative function, but rather for its usage of telling the time, we cannot consider a piece of jewelry. Therefore, since a wristwatch cannot be categorized as a garment or as a piece of jewelry it may not be worn outside on Shabbos.

2) The opinion of the Shmiras Shabbos K’hilchaso: It depends on the type of wristwatch

The *Shmiras Shabbos K’hilchaso*²² differentiates between two different types of wristwatches: a simple-looking wristwatch and a decorative wristwatch:

A simple-looking (non-decorative) wristwatch may not be worn outdoors on Shabbos, because it cannot be considered a garment or a piece of jewelry and thus wearing it outdoors (where there is no *eiruv*) violates the *melacha* of *Hotza*. However, a wristwatch which is primarily worn for decoration, is considered a piece of jewelry, and may be worn outdoors on Shabbos. Meaning, if one would wear a decorative wristwatch *even when it is broken*, then it is indicative that the wristwatch is being worn as jewelry and not merely to tell the time, and thus may be worn in *Reshus Ha’rabim* on Shabbos.

3) The opinion of Rav Moshe Feinstein: A wristwatch may be worn outside on Shabbos

Rav Moshe Feinstein²³ rules that both a simple-looking wristwatch and a decorative wristwatch may be worn outside on Shabbos. Rav Moshe explains that a wristwatch can always be considered a “garment,” because it is worn closely on one’s body. Therefore, since all wristwatches (both a simple-looking watch and a decorative one) are considered a garment, they may be worn in a *Reshus Ha’rabim* on Shabbos.

Still, Rav Moshe concludes that “someone who is a *ben Torah* and is G-d fearing should not rely on this leniency [and should not wear a wristwatch in a *Reshus Ha’rabim* on Shabbos] ... This is the practice which I instruct my students to adhere to.”²⁴

To summarize

There are three opinions regarding wearing wristwatches in a *Reshus Ha’rabim* (which does not have a proper *eiruv*) on Shabbos:

- 1) *Tzitz Eliezer*. One should not wear any type of wristwatch outdoors on Shabbos, because they cannot be considered a garment or jewelry and thus violates the *melacha* of *Hotza*.
- 2) *Shmiras Shabbos K’hilchaso*. Although one may not wear a simple wristwatch outdoors on Shabbos, one may wear a decorative watch (which one would wear even while broken) outdoors on Shabbos.
- 3) Rav Moshe Feinstein. one may wear all types of watches outdoors on Shabbos since they are worn directly on one’s body, they are considered a garment which may be worn outside on Shabbos. Still, Rav Moshe suggests that someone who is a G-d fearing individual should not rely on this leniency and should not wear a wristwatch outdoors on Shabbos.

19 303:22. The Shulchan Aruch himself gives two answers to this question: 1) In truth it is rabbinically forbidden to wear jewelry on outdoors on Shabbos, however since if we would tell women not to wear jewelry, they would not listen it is better that they remain *shogegin* (someone who sins by mistake) than to become *meizidin* (someone who sins on purpose). 2) [According to some opinions] we do not have a real *Reshus Ha’rabim* nowadays (since most cities do not have 600,000 people), and the rabbinical prohibition against wearing jewelry does not apply in an area which is not a real *Reshus Ha’rabim*. However, the *Aruch Ha’shluchan* (303:22-23) argues that neither of these reasons is truly sufficient to explain why women wear jewelry nowadays. Therefore, he concludes that the correct explanation is the one given by the Rema. See however *Biur Halacha* 303:18 *d”h ki*. 20 303:22 21 11:28 22 18:27, based on *Biur Halacha* 301:11, *d”h ba’zeh*; see *Orchos Shabbos* 28:136 23 *Igros Moshe* O.C. 1:111 [See *sefer V’dibarta Bom*, *siman* 88 who discusses this leniency of Rav Moshe extensively] 24 Rav Moshe (*Igros Moshe*, *ibid*) explains that the reason why one should not wear wristwatches outside on Shabbos is “because if one wears wristwatches outside on Shabbos, he may come to be lenient and wear other types of watches, such as a pocket watch, which may not be worn outside on Shabbos [since it is not worn directly on one’s body]. Furthermore, one may come to be lenient and wear the wristwatch on top of a garment (e.g., his shirt or jacket) and not directly on his body [and thus is not considered a garment]. [There is reason to be concerned about this because] many people do not realize that there would be a difference in halacha between these different [situations].” In a conversation with Rabbi Moskowitz (author of *sefer V’dibarta Bom*) he said that Rav Dovid Feinstein told him that Rav Moshe never intended to institute this concern as an actual “*gezeira*” against wearing wristwatches in *Reshus Ha’rabim*, rather it was a concern which Rav Moshe personally was concerned about. Meaning to say, if someone feels that these concerns are not applicable to him personally, there may be room for him to wear the wristwatch on Shabbos.