



Parshas Eikev 5768

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I heard that one is forbidden to tie a sailor's knot on Shabbos, but are not all knots forbidden?

In order to answer your question we need to lay down the foundation of the *sugya*. The pertaining *Mishna* and *gemora* can be found in *Shabbos* 111b-112a. We find that the major *Rishonim* differ over the understanding of the *sugya* and hence the ramifications vary greatly.

The *halacha* subdivides the tying of knots on Shabbos into three categories: 1) Knots that are Biblically prohibited to tie, 2) Knots that are Rabbinically prohibited to tie and 3) Knots that are permitted to tie.

Ossur mid'oraisso: the *gemora* says – בדאושקפי (*bid'ushkepi*). *Rashi* explains that the leather worker would insert a strap into the shoe and tie it permanently into place. Since this knot is a permanent one, it is *ossur mid'oraisso*.

Ossur mid'rabanen: the *gemora* says *bid'rabanen* (the student's shoes). *Rashi* explains that the students would tie their shoe straps loosely to their legs enabling the shoes' removal without having to untie the knots. Nevertheless they were not permanent knots, because when walking in mud they would untie the knots and fasten the straps tightly to their legs so that the shoe would not stick to the mud and come off.

Permitted: בני מכוזא (*B'nei Mechoza*). *Rashi* explains that the people of *Mechoza* were meticulous with their clothing and would tie the straps tight to the point that they could not be slipped off the leg. Therefore it was not a permanent knot since they would have to fasten and unfasten the shoe straps to their legs on a daily basis.

The *Rif* and the *Rambam* add another factor – **craftsmanship**. They see in the *sugya* that for a

knot to be Biblically prohibited it must be the type tied by craftsmen. The underlying feature of such a knot is its strength. ¹

So where does the sailor knot come in?

The sailor knot is a craftsman's knot *par excellence* and would definitely contribute towards a perpetrator being guilty of a Biblical transgression.

The other factor is **time** and according to *Rashi* and the *Rosh* it is the only factor. A knot tied forever – *kayama* – is *ossur mid'oraisso*. Longer than a week or 24 hours (two opinions) is *ossur mid'rabanen*.

Less than a week or 24 hours (the respective opinions) is permitted.

The synopsis is as follows:

	Permanent	Semi permanent	< 24 hours < a week
Craftsman's knot	Biblical according to all	<i>Rif</i> and <i>Rambam</i> – Rabbinical	<i>Rif</i> and <i>Rambam</i> – Rabbinical <i>Rashi Rosh</i> – permitted
Layman's knot	<i>Rif</i> and <i>Rambam</i> – rabbinical <i>Rashi Rosh</i> – Biblical	<i>Rif</i> and <i>Rambam</i> – <i>machlokes</i> ² <i>Rashi Rosh</i> – Rabbinical	Permitted

¹ *Shiltei Giborim* and other *Achronim*.

² There is a *machlokes* amongst the *poskim* as to when neither of the Biblical factors are present whether it is *ossur mid'rabanen* or permitted.

There are two opinions as to the **permitted** time factor and *L'chatchila* one should not tie even a simple knot on Shabbos if he intends untying it after 24 hours.

Which of the above opinions is the halacha?

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Mechaber*)³ rules according to the *Rif* and the *Rambam* and the *Rama* rules according to *Rashi* and the *Rosh*, at least *l'chumra*. Accordingly one may only tie a simple knot within the permitted time bracket.

Are most knots permitted because after all most knots are not craftsmen's knots?

Things are not so simple. The *poskim* hold that a strong **double knot** is classed as a craftsman's knot due to its sturdiness and strength; hence one may not tie a double knot even for less than 24 hours.

What about a double knot tied in a woman's kerchief or the knot in the handkerchief tied around one's neck, are they also forbidden?

Since the main feature of a craftsman's knot is its strength and these particular knots are not tied sturdily, one is permitted to loosely tie them.
⁴ This would seemingly not apply to tying shoelaces in a double knot owing to the fact that they are fastened tightly.

May I tie a knot at the end of my tzizis, after all it is not a double knot?

The **permitted single knot** is the knot beneath the bow on one's shoe (without the bow). Such a knot cannot last at all and is not strong. For example, tying two handles of a plastic bag in the same manner as the knot on a shoe (we are not referring the knot where the two handles are twisted into one and tied, that comes later). Since this is only a single knot and if one were to apply any pressure to the bag the knot would open.

³ *Siman* 317:1.

⁴ *Zachor VeShamor*, *Hilchos קושר*, pp 7-8.

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Note: The purpose of this series is intended solely for the clarification of the topics discussed and not to render halachic decisions. It is intended to heighten everyone's awareness of important practical questions which do arise on this topic. One must consult with a proper halachic authority in order to receive p'sak.

Such a knot may be tied for an unlimited time.

The **forbidden single knots** include a single knot tied into the middle of a string; the knot tied at the ends of one's *tzizis* to prevent them from unraveling; two handles twisted into one, forming a loop and threading the head through the loop and the knot tied at the end of a sewing thread. Seeing that these knots can be tight and strong they share the same characteristics as the double knot and are forbidden to tie on Shabbos.

Being that the forbidden single knot is classified as a craftsman's knot (similar to the double knot) it is forbidden to tie it even if one intends untying it within 24 hours.

Vort on the Parsha

We see from the *Sifri* the **כה ברכה** of a *tzaddik*. The *Sifri* 28 says and you find that wherever a *tzaddik* walks, he brings a *b'racha* with him, as we find with the house of Edom the *Gitite* who was blessed for housing the *Aron Elokim*. And it is a *kal vachomer*, the *Aron* was only manufactured to house the remnants of the *luchos* and yet it brought *b'racha* where it was housed, *tzaddikim*, who are the *raison d'être* of the entire universe, obviously they will bring *b'racha* wherever they are.

<If we were given the choice to accommodate a *tzaddik* or the *Aron*, I think we would choose the *Aron*...so we better think again>

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