



Parshas Vayeitzei 5764

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May children play with a writing board, which consists of a plastic sheet that when lifted erases the letters?

The *Mishna* in *Shabbos* 104b specifies the foundation for the *melacha* of כותב – writing. The two main fundamentals of the *melacha* are that one write with long-lasting ink and that the letters are written on a durable surface. These two features coupled with the required amount of letters written, obligate the writer to bring a *korban* for violating an *issur d'oraisso* – a biblical commandment. The *Mishna* says that were one to write with say fruit juice on a durable surface or with ink on a non-durable surface, one would be absolved of an *issur d'oraisso*. Nevertheless, *mid'rabanen* one is prohibited from doing so. We must add that it is not imperative that ink be used to be liable for the *issur d'oraisso* because engraving or etching is equal to writing with ink, provided that it is done on a surface which leaves an imprint, thus fulfilling two of the requisites of the *melacha*.¹

Based on the above, a delegation from 'Hachovesh', (the emergency service of Har Nof, Yerushalayim) approached Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach זצ"ל and asked whether the writing board with the plastic sheet could be used on Shabbos for writing by the emergency dispatcher. (They were obviously aware that normally it would at least be *ossur*

mid'rabanen to use such a board, however the question was whether it was better than writing with ink on paper).

Rav Shlomo Zalman answered that one has not gained anything by writing on such a board, because although one normally erases everything etched onto the board, but until it is erased it is considered permanent writing and therefore a *d'oraisso*.

Therefore, to answer the question, writing or drawing on such a board on Shabbos is *ossur mid'oraisso*.

Is one permitted to draw shapes in a frosted window?

Drawing shapes or writing on a frosted window is *ossur mid'rabanen* on Shabbos. Although the writing is not permanent, nevertheless *Chazal* prohibited writing or drawing that is non-permanent. Accordingly therefore, one may not write by tracing one's finger in sand, or write in a film of liquid on a table, or draw a picture in the dust on a table.²

What about writing in the air?

There is no *issur* to imaginarily draw shapes or write letters in the air because one is not leaving a mark anywhere.³ For the same reason one may trace letters with a 'dry'

¹ There are other conditions, e.g. writing two letters that are readable together; writing in the normal fashion and others.

² *Simon* 340:4 and *M"B* 18 - 19.

³ The *Rama* in *simon* 340:4

finger on the table or on paper because one is not leaving an impression.

Is there a problem eating cookies or cake with letters formed on them?

Maharam answered that although it is not an *issur d'oraisso* because for erasing to be an *issur d'oraisso* it must be with intention of replacing the erasure or for some other positive benefit. Notwithstanding, it is *ossur mid'rabanan*, but since it involves **children** and adults are not handing them an *issur*,⁴ it is permitted for them to eat the cake. The *Rama*⁵ quotes this as the *halacha*. The *Mishna Berura*⁶ however quotes the *Nodah B'yhuda*⁷ who argues and is lenient. He says that the case of the *Maharam* was where the writing was purposely intended to be eaten by the children as a סגולה – a spiritual enhancement to Torah (on *Shavuos*) and therefore he only permitted it for children, but in regular cases everyone may eat such cake. The *Mishna Berura* rules that one may rely on the lenient opinion when biting into the letter with one's teeth, but he does not permit cutting the letters. The *Mishna Berura*⁸ adds that the entire debate revolves around letters formed on cake or cookies, such as icing, but when the writing is of the same substance as the cookie, i.e. it is etched into the cookie, there is no problem to break or cut the cookie.⁹

⁴ This either means that the children were taking the cake by themselves, or more probably it means that parents were handing them the cake to eat and 'by the way' the letters were erased, and that is not called being handed an *issur* by the adults as the adults' focus is on the eating.

⁵ *Simon* 340:3.

⁶ *M"B Simon* 340:17.

⁷ See the *שערי תשובה*.

⁸ *M"B Simon* 340:15.

⁹ The *Chazon Ish* argues on many of the conclusions of the *M"B* and is not lenient.

Vort on the Parsha

I was fortunate to accompany מו"ר HaRav Shlomo Zalman during the week of *parshas Vayeitzeh* to visit a child after a car accident. In order to cheer him up, the Rav asked him the following question. The *possuk* says that Ya'akov Avinu saw in his dream that angels were ascending to the heavens and descending – עולים ויורדים בו. Since the angels' responsibility was to accompany Ya'akov, if the angels of *Eretz Yisrael* ascended before the angels of *Chutz La'aretz* descended they would leave him on his own, so should the angels of *chutz la'aretz* not have first descended before the local angels ascend?

The Rav offered two answers: one of them was that the *gemora* quotes two *p'sukim* regarding the town called Timna. Once it says that Shimshon went down to Timna and once it says that he went up to Timna. Where was Timna, at the top of the mountain or at the bottom? One of the answers of the *gemora* is that it depends on purpose of his going to Timna. When it was for something beneficial it was called **going up** and for something unfavorable it was called **going down**. The rav said that accompanying Ya'akov Avinu was a spiritual uplift and therefore indeed the angels of *Chutz La'aretz* descended before the angels of *Eretz Yisrael* ascended, and when the *possuk* says עולים it means that the *Chutz La'aretz* angels were descending – to be with Ya'akov Avinu – which was called **going up**. The angels of *Eretz Yisrael* that were leaving Ya'akov Avinu were considered יורדים. So indeed he was not left on his own, the angels descending were **going up** and the angels descending were **going down**.

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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.