



# THE SHABBOS WEEKLY

## HALACHA SERIES ON HILCHOS SHABBOS

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*May one open a book with letters or words written on the edges of the pages? (The words are seen when the book is closed).*

In his responsa the *Rama* addressed what seemed to be a common issue. It was customary to decorate a *sefer* with writing on the edges of the pages and hence the question was whether it is permitted to open such a book, thereby erasing letters, and shutting the book, thereby writing and reforming letters.

The *Rama*<sup>1</sup> and many others permitted this, saying that it is similar to the opening and the shutting of a door. Just as we do not say that opening or shutting a door is *Boneh* and *Soter* (construction and dismantling of the building) so too we do not say that one is writing or erasing when opening and shutting such a book because it is 'created' to do so.

On the other hand the *Levush* and the *M" A* held that one should not use such a book on Shabbos.<sup>2</sup>

The *M" B* states that the custom is in accordance with the *Rama*, but if possible to use another book without edge printing, one should use the alternative book. He concludes that one should definitely avoid printing such *seforim* in order to comply with all the *poskim*.<sup>3</sup>

*Are there any cases where erasing will be beneficial and constructive and thus ossur mid'oraisso?*

Besides the obvious case of erasing in order to be able to write in the place of the erroneous letters, there is another case. The *P'ri Megadim* writes<sup>4</sup> that erasing an IOU note that has been paid would be an *issur d'oraisso*, because it is beneficial. Usually erasing is destructive unless done with the intention of writing in its place, but in this case the erasure is beneficial on its own.

*Is there an issur d'oraisso to write over existing letters?*

The *gemora* says that it depends: writing with black ink over black ink is only an *issur d'rabanan* because one has not added anything; writing with black ink over red is an *issur d'oraisso* because of the added quality to the existing writing.<sup>5</sup> As it happens one is also violating an *issur d'oraisso* of erasing, by erasing the red ink beneath the black. It follows that if the original black ink has faded and one reinforces the writing one would be liable for violating an *issur d'oraisso*.

*Why is it so important to know which writing is an issur d'oraisso and which d'rabanan, after all - all are prohibited?*

There are a few answers to this question.

1) It is part of learning Torah. One's Torah learning must be clear and precise.

<sup>1</sup> Cited in the *M" B simon* 340:17, see the *Sha'ar Ha'tsiun* 24.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, and *Sha'ar Ha'tsiun* 23.

<sup>3</sup> *Sha'ar Ha'tsiun* 25.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in the *Bi'ur Halacha* in *simon* 340:3 ד"ה המוחק דין.

<sup>5</sup> *M" B* 340:22 (3).

2) One who violates an *issur d'oraisso* must bring a *korban chatas*. This carries implications nowadays even though there is no *Beis Hamikdash* with respect to giving *tzedaka* (charity) the equivalent of a *korban*. Also, we find in the *gemora* that one of the *Tana'im* violated an *issur d'oraisso* unintentionally and said that he must write in his notebook that when the *Beis Hamikdash* will be rebuilt he will bring a *korban chatas*.

3) It is sometimes necessary when dealing with *pikuach nefesh* (life saving) to write down crucial details. In an emergency situation of dire proportions one would write in the normal fashion - that is with a normal writing implement on paper etc., but when the situation is not critical, even though writing is imperative, one should try and find other methods of writing which will not involve the violation of an *issur d'oraisso*.

#### ***Name a practical example of writing that is not a d'oraisso.***

A right-handed person writing with his left hand is only violating an *issur d'rabanana*.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, if time permits, one should write with one's left hand.

Writing with self-erasing ink, according to some *poskim*<sup>7</sup> is only an *issur d'rabanana*. This is because we learnt in the last shiur that one of the criteria for writing to be an *issur d'oraisso* is for the writing to be long lasting. One would therefore write on Shabbos with self erasing ink and copy it down after Shabbos.

Although writing a single letter is an *issur d'oraisso*<sup>8</sup> nevertheless one is only liable to

bring a *korban* for writing two letters. Therefore, when possible (and extremely necessary) one would write a letter with an apostrophe, such as 'n, which is not considered as writing a word (or even two letters) even though it is understood what is meant.

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### **Vort on the Parsha**

*Chazal* say that Eisav was savagely attacked by the angels sent by *Ya'akov avinu* and the only way he was able to ward them off was to say that he was Ya'akov's brother. The question is then, when Eisav asked Ya'akov "who were they" (33:8) Ya'akov replied that they were sent in order to appease you, but if they indeed were angels who mercilessly beat him, how exactly did they appease Eisav?

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin says that Eisav would not have been impressed had Ya'akov sent people who could give over a beautiful shiur in Torah, Eisav appreciated brute force and strength. Ya'akov therefore sent angels who would speak Eisav's language and indeed he was highly "impressed".

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### **Food For Thought**

*Does the issur d'oraisso of writing apply to lashon hakodesh only or is it expanded to other languages as well?*

*What is the halacha if one wrote a single letter in one place and another letter somewhere else - is it an issur d'oraisso?*

*Is there an issur to write with one's mouth?*

*What is the status of drawing figures or pictures on Shabbos?*

Answers coming next week.

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<sup>6</sup> See the *SS"K* 32:49.

<sup>7</sup> Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach in his *sefer Minchas Shlomo simon* 91:11. HaRav Yitschak Weissz, in his *sefer Minchas Yitschak* argues with Rav Shlomo Zalman and says that if it lasts for the Shabbos it is an *issur d'oraisso*.

<sup>8</sup> *M"B simon* 340:22 (4).

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If you would like to send a question to Rav Ostroff, you can write to him at [shabbosweekly@shemayisrael.com](mailto:shabbosweekly@shemayisrael.com).

**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.