



Parshas Mattos/Massei 5770

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Is one permitted to peel a scab on Shabbos?

The *Shulchan Aruch* says that one may peel scabs on Shabbos. The ¹קצות השלחן explains that since scabs eventually fall off the skin, they are in a better *halachic* position than skin peelings (cuticles), and therefore they may be removed even when they do not cause distress. One must not remove or peel scabs when it will cause bleeding because that is prohibited. ²

What about removing or cutting a wart?

Warts are part of one's skin and may therefore not be removed or cut from one's body on Shabbos. ³ Warts share the same rule as regular pieces of skin that may not be pulled or yanked off one's skin.

May a girl braid her hair on Shabbos?

Aside from the issue of pulling out hair on Shabbos, which is a problem of גזוז, there is a problem of making plaits. *Chazal* tell us that making plaits or braiding hair on Shabbos is associated with *Boneh*. *Chazal* learnt this from the fact that *Hashem* presented *Chava* to *Adam Harishon* with her hair in plaits, because it says וַיִּבֶן אֶת הַצֵּלַע – He built the *Tzela*. A girl may also not unravel plaits because that would be a problem of

dismantling – *Soter*. Nevertheless it is only an *issur d'rabanan* as it only **appears** like *Boneh*. ⁴

Where did erasing take place in the Mishkan?

Erasing was one of the 39 *melachos* used to construct the *Mishkan*. The uniqueness of this *melacha* is that, together with a selected few other *melachot*, it is a destructive *melacha* in that it is not productive on its own. Although erasing is destructive, in the *Mishkan* it was utilized for constructive purposes: *Chazal* tell us that the beams of the *Mishkan* were numbered, and if a wrong number was written on a beam, it would be **erased** to write the correct number. This is **constructive** erasing. Nowadays as well, in order for erasing to be a *melacha d'oraisso* it must be constructive.

How many letters must one erase in order to be liable to bring a korban?

The *Melacha* of writing – כותב in the *Mishkan* was implemented to write on the beams. Consecutive numbers were written on the beams in order to remember the correct place for each beam. Hence the minimum requirement is writing two digits. ⁵ Since the *melacha* of erasing is the diametrical opposite

¹ R' Chaim Na'eh, סי' קל"ו סי"ד בבדה"ש סקכ"ב.

² *SS"K* 35:31.

³ *Siman* 340:2.

⁴ *Siman* 303:26 and *SS"K* 14:52.

⁵ One digit, number or letter is also an *issur d'oraisso* of חצי שיעור but a *korban* is only brought for writing two digits.

of writing, it too consists of erasing two digits to replace the two errant digits.⁶

Does the melacha only take place when two digits (or two letters) are erased?

The *Bi'ur Halacha*⁷ says that the object of the *melacha* is to enable the writing of two letters and not the erasure *per se* of two letters. Consequently, erasing an ink blot, a smudge or basically anything large enough that occupies the space of two letters is an *issur d'oraisso*.

The *Bach*⁸ holds that if an ink blot or wax falls onto letters obscuring them from sight and one erases the ink blot thus exposing the letters, one would be *chayav* on account of the *melacha* of writing.⁹ It is likewise *ossur* to erase dirt pasted over even one letter or digit. It seems that this was a practical problem. A scribe would sometimes write a *sefer Torah* by the light of a candle and occasionally wax would drip onto the *sefer Torah*. During the reading of the portion on Shabbos they would discover that some letters are covered in wax and are obscured from sight. Since it is a problem to “read” the Torah by heart they were obligated to remove the wax. The *Bach* holds, as mentioned, that it is a severe *issur* to do so. The *Mishna Berura*¹⁰ rules that in such an event they must “read” those words by heart and not take out another *sefer Torah*.

⁶ Even though theoretically it would be sufficient to erase one wrong digit and write the correct one in its stead and thus have two correct digits or letters adjacent to each other. Nevertheless *Chazal* say that erasing cannot be more severe than the main *melacha* of writing, which is two letters.

⁷ *Siman* 340:3 ד"ה המוחק דיו.

⁸ Mentioned in the *M"B* 340:10.

⁹ The *Bi'ur Halacha* writes that the *Shvus Ya'akov* argues on the *Bach* and holds that there is no *issur* to expose hidden letters in this manner, but many *poskim* agree with the *Bach* and rule that one must follow the *Bach*.

¹⁰ *Siman* 340:10. There are more complicated cases that may occur, see the *M"B* inside.

Could this scenario be applicable in the home as well?

Yes, very easily. The *Bi'ur Halacha*¹¹ writes that if two pages are stuck to each other where letters are located, either with wax, dirt or glue, separating the pages would be a problem of erasing. As many of us have experienced, the pages of a *bentcher* stick together at the letters with dried food, wine or such. Separating them generates this problem.

If two letters in a sefer Torah are touching, may one erase the point where they touch?

Two letters touching in a *sefer Torah*, *tefillin* or *mezuzah* render it *posul* and the letters must be corrected.¹² The *halachos* in such an event are many and the manner of correction depends on where the letters are touching. In certain cases it suffices to erase the point of contact.

In such a case, even though one is not erasing two letters or even an ink blot the size of two letters, nevertheless it is equivalent to the *melacha* of writing because by erasing the point of contact one is correcting the *sefer Torah*.

¹¹ ביאור הלכה ד"ה שעל הקלף.

¹² If one finds letters touching in a *sefer torah* during the reading, whether on Shabbos or on a weekday, taking out another *sefer torah* will depend on the point of contact.

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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.