

THE SHABBOS WEEKLY

HALACHA SERIES ON HILCHOS SHABBOS

Published by



A Project of
The Shema Yisrael Torah Network

based on the shiurim given by

RABBI DOVID
OSTROFF shlita

developed from the Chabura of the
Shulchan Aruch Project

These halachos were shown by Rabbi Ostroff to HaGaon HaRav Moshe Sternbuch, shlita

Parshas Va'eschanan 5770

May children play with a writing board, which is has a plastic sheet which when lifted erases the letters?

The Mishna in Shabbos 104b specifies the foundation for the *melacha* of **כְּתָבָה** – 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'oraissos* – 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'oraissos*. Nevertheless, *mid'rabanan* 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'oraissos* 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 *zts"l* and asked whether the writing board with the plastic sheet could be used on Shabbos for writing with by the emergency dispatcher. (They were obviously aware that normally it would at least be *issur mid'rabanan* 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,



July 23, '10
Volume IX Issue 21

because although one normally erases everything etched onto the board, but until it is erased it is considered permanent writing and therefore a *d'oraissos*.

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

Is one permitted to draw shapes on a frosted window?

Drawing shapes or writing on a frosted window is *issur mid'rabanan* 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' 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?

² *Siman* 340:4 and *M"B* 18 - 19.

³ The *Rama* in *siman* 340:4

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

The *Mordechai*⁴ in the 7th *perek* of Shabbos cites a question posed to the *Maharam*. The custom was that on Yom Tov (probably *Shavuos*) children would eat cake with letters formed on the cake and the problem is that they were erasing the letters. The *Maharam* answered that although it is not an *issur d'oraissa* because for erasing to be an *issur d'oraissa* it must be with intention of replacing the erasure or for some other positive benefit. Notwithstanding, it is *osur mid'rabanan*, but since it involves **children** and adults are not handing them an *issur*,⁵ it is permitted for them to eat the cake. The *Rama*⁶ quotes this as the *halacha*. The *Mishna Berura*⁷ however quotes the *Nodah B'yehuda*⁸ 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 **segulah** – 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*⁹ 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.¹⁰

⁴ ר' מרדכי בן היל אשכנזי - A relative of the *Rosh*, son-in-law of R' Yechiel of Paris, brother-in-law and student of the *Maharam*

M'Rotenberg and a student of Rabbeinu Peretz. Died with wife and five children in the Rindfleisch Massacres.

⁵ 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, ע"צ.

⁶ *Siman* 340:3.

⁷ *M" B siman* 340:17.

⁸ See the **שער תשובה**.

⁹ *M" B siman* 340:15.

¹⁰ The *Chazon Ish* argues on many of the conclusions of the *M" B* and is not lenient.

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 respona 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*¹¹ 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.¹²

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*.¹³

Orchos Chaim LaRosh

- וגער ביצר הרע המשיאך ללבך בדרכיו לבך -
scold your *yetzer harah* who attempts to make you follow your heart. The *yetzer harah* is not your friend; he is not out there for your good. It may seem that he is... "sleep a bit more in the morning, there's still time to get ready for *davening*". "It's not so bad to look at everything around you, what, do you want to be considered extra *frum*?" The Rosh teaches us to scold and shout at him and push him away and if we treat him as a foe, we stand a chance.

¹¹ Cited in the *M" B simon* 340:17, see the *Sha'ar Ha'tsiun* 24.

¹² Ibid, and *Sha'ar Ha'tsiun* 23.

¹³ *Sha'ar Ha'tsiun* 25.

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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*.