

# HALOCHOSCOPE <sup>TOI</sup>

Someone, apparently intentionally, wrote out the Holy Name of Hashem in full, in Hebrew, with chalk on a blackboard. May this Name be erased to use the blackboard for other purposes? Does the blackboard temporarily, (or permanently,) now have a different status, while this Name is written on it? If the Name is not erased, are there any restrictions on what may be done in its presence?

The issues:

(A) *Mechikas Hashem*, erasing a *Shem*, the Name of Hashem; *Genizah*, storing or burying things with the Name of Hashem written on them.

(B) The status of chalk-written words

(C) The status of the chalk-board

(A) *Mechikas Hashem and Genizah*

It is Scripturally forbidden to erase one of the seven Names that identify Hashem by His attributes [listed in Shevuos 36a.] This is stated in the Torah where we are commanded to destroy idols and their names: “You shall not do so to Hashem!” [Parshas Re’ay 12:4]. In addition, there is a positive commandment to fear Hashem [Parshas Eikev 6:13] forbidding using Hashems’s Name in vain or erasing it. Generally, an item attains holiness through a verbal proclamation. For a *Shem* to become truly sanctified the writer must declare, before beginning to write it, his intention to write this word *Lishma*, with the holiness ascribed to a *Shem*. Once it is written, the *Shem* assumes a holiness of its own, capable of sanctifying the other letters suffixed to it. It also sanctifies the whole scroll or paper it is written on to a lesser degree. There are many preconditions for the validity of a *Shem* written in a Sefer Torah or Mezuzah, such as the materials used. However, *Mechika* is forbidden even when many of these preconditions are not met. Therefore, a *Shem* written in colored ink, on wood or other materials, or embossed on metal or glass, is still forbidden to erase. Engraved and embroidered *Sheimos* are the subject of some discussion, with a number of Poskim ruling them to be full-fledged *Sheimos*, Scripturally forbidden to erase, even though they are not considered “written”. It is also forbidden to erase a *Shem* written in a different Hebrew alphabet than

that used for Sifrei Torah, such as "Rashi" lettering. Erasing includes cutting through them or melting in the case of metal. If the Shem was not written Lishma, there are varying opinions about the prohibition against erasing them. According to some Poskim, although it is invalid for the requirements of a Mezuzah or Sefer Torah, it is still Scripturally forbidden to erase. Others consider it a Rabbinic ordinance. With regard to printing done Lishma, some Poskim feel that, although the actual writing is not done by a human, the press is manned by a human with the required intent; he caused the writing and there was little other power involved. There is a difference between manually powered press and an electrically powered one, there being more outside power in the case of an electric machine. In any event, most printed material was not printed Lishma. Since it was also not hand-written, it is somewhat less significant with regard to Mechikah.

Words that have holiness but are not Sheimos themselves Rabbinically may not be erased. This includes the prefixes to a Shem and the other words in a Sefer Torah, Mezuzah or Chumash. In fact, a single Passuk, or even a fragment of one, may also not normally be erased, and must be treated respectfully. This also applies to translations of Sheimos and to words used to identify Hashem by His attributes that are not included in the seven Names. *Sefarim*, books used to learn from, may not be destroyed either. Some Poskim say that the following four factors can ascribe holiness: the materials used; the form of the lettering (anything written in *K'sav Ashuri*, the Alef-Bais used for a Sefer Torah, has inherent sanctity); the intent of the writer; and the content of the words, i.e., anything learned from.

*Grama*, indirectly erasing a Shem is not considered Mechikah when it is not intentional. For example, one who has a Shem written on his skin may *Tovel*, bathe in a Mikvah, even though the Shem will be erased by the water. However, *Grama* should be avoided in most cases. When a Shem is not erased in a destructive manner, but for constructive purposes, there are varying opinions whether the Scriptural prohibition is violated. When one needs to correct a Sefer Torah, one may erase the other words which do not have the Scriptural prohibition.

There is a Mitzvah to fear the *Mikdash*, which is applied to giving special respect to all things holy, such as not sitting in the same level as a Chumash or not leaving a Sefer on the floor. Therefore, even when not erasing something directly, one is in violation of this commandment when disposing of Sheimos in a disrespectful manner. We, therefore, do not dispose of Sheimos in the garbage, but bury them. A Sefer Torah that is no longer kosher is buried in an earthen vessel at the head of a Torah Sage. Less holy writings are also not disposed of but locked

away in a *Genizah*, a storage place, so they are neither destroyed nor mistreated. There is an opinion that, depending on the circumstances, one may allow Sheimos to be burned as long as one does not actively participate in their burning, and they are burned together with other things. Accordingly, some Poskim suggest that the less holy writings such as printed a Hebrew Passuk in K'sav Ashuri (often found on wedding invitations), or a *D'var Torah* in English that was learned from, may be placed into the garbage, in a respectful manner (carefully wrapped so they do not get dirty from the other garbage). This way they are not being discarded disrespectfully and will ultimately be buried, or at worst, incinerated.

*Tashmishei Kedusha*, anything used to honor Sifrei Torah, Tefilin and Mezuzos, or used in contact with them, may not be destroyed. Some Poskim view this as a Scriptural commandment while others consider it Rabbinical. There is an opinion that printed Sefarim are not real Sheimos but Tashmishei Kedusha. [See Shabbos 115-116, 120. Eruvin 98a. Megillah 26b. Rosh Hashana 18b. Gitin 45b, 54b. Makos 22a. Shavuos 35a-36a. Menachos 30b, 32b. Sofrim 3:11-13. commentaries. Rambam Hil Yesodai Hatora 6. Hil Sefer Torah 10:2-11, Kiryas Sefer. Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 154. Yoreh Deah 276 282 284:2, commentaries. 179:8. Shach 11. Chavos Yair (106) 116. Chinuch 437, Minchas Chinuch. Chazon Ish Y.D. 164:2-3. Igros Moshe Y.D. 2:134-136. Shvus Yaakov 3:10. Tzedaka Umishpat 16 etc. esp. notes 79-83, 91, 93.]

### **(B) A Shem written with chalk**

The Poskim discuss a teacher writing out Pessukim for temporary use. Several Pessukim would be written on a "Luach" or board, as many as the student could handle. The following week these would be erased, and new Pesukim (presumably from the current Parsha) would be written. This board could have been a slate with a wax coating, or might be the original chalkboard. The Poskim permit erasing the Pessukim, but not the Shaimos. In this case, the words were decidedly written to be studied, and have the applicable Kedusha. In our case, though the Shem seems to be written carefully in the corner of the board, it does not appear to be written to be studied. Thus, it does not have that level of Kedusha. Nonetheless, evidently, a chalk-written Shem may not be erased merely due to its temporary nature.

The Talmud discusses writing and erasing with regard to the Melachos on Shabbos. Only permanent writing is considered written, though it is Rabbinically forbidden to erase temporary writing as well. Writing on the skin is considered permanent and normal, since things are written on skins (parchment etc.) It is also

forbidden to immerse oneself when a Shem is written on his skin, or at least not to rub the Shem. Thus although this Shem will eventually wear off, it is considered written. The Poskim also forbid pencil writing, though it will later be erased, since it can last a long time. And, apparently, according to the aforementioned Poskim, chalkboard writing is also considered written.

The following ploy has been suggested. A large piece of tape that covers the entire Shem is placed over the chalk, then lifted off in one piece. This could then be disposed of in a Genizah. However, this is a risky attempt. It must be tried on other words a few times. This will ascertain what the chances are to retain the entire Shem. If they are good, it may be done. If it is unsuccessful, the resulting erasure, or partial erasure, is considered a *Grama*, indirect erasing, which some Poskim permit under special circumstances. In our case, the disrespect that the Shem is likely to be exposed to might be termed such special circumstances. Though some Poskim forbid *Grama* when done with intent, our suggestion is an attempt to avoid it. In addition, this case is also a *Davar Sheaino Miskavain*, or *Safeik Psik Raisha*, act that need not necessarily result in a forbidden act, which is permitted. [See Shabbos 104b 120b, Poskim. Tur Sh. Ar. O.C. 340:4 (Biur Halacha) Y.D. 276 (Pischei Teshuva 19, Ar. Hash. 36-37 Mishmeress Shalom 13) 283 (Pischei Teshuva 2) Tzedaka Umishpat 16: note 84.]

### **(C) The board**

As long as the Shem is written on the board, whether or not we know it was written Lishma, it must be respected. One may not behave indecently in its presence. The rest of a piece of parchment with a Shem written on it often assumes the sanctity of the Shem. This is because in the case of a Sefer Torah and the like the scroll becomes secondary in importance to its written words. However, if a Shem is written on a wall, the wall does not become secondary to the words. Since the wall is meant to be used for other purposes as well, it does not assume the same sanctity. This would appear to be true in our case as well. Nonetheless, whenever possible, the Shem should be covered when mundane things are written on the board. It is also possible that walls differ from scrolls due to other uses. Accordingly, a chalkboard might be more like a scroll. However, since the chalkboard is not meant to be dedicated to the first thing is written on it, it is more like a wall. [See Tzedaka Umishpat 16: note 84.]