

HALOCHOSCOPE ^{TOI}

Addition to last week's issue: Some readers raised the question of keeping regular puppets in one's possession. The actual question, which was abridged, was about an entire set of puppets, one of which was of a devil. If the other puppets have human features they do indeed raise the issues discussed last week. However, many Poskim are of the opinion that if the whole body is not represented the image may be retained in one's possession. Furthermore, facial features may be altered or defaced such that the image is now deficient. This is sufficient to permit keeping the image. In addition, these puppets are usually caricatures, which are not meant to truly represent an image, but rather a mood or typical type. They do not usually have proper features anyhow.

This week's question:

May one decorate a birthday cake on Shabbos, using ready made hard sugar letters? If a cake has been so decorated may it be cut through the words, separating the letters?

The issues:

(A) The *Melacha* of *Kosaiv*, writing, on Shabbos.

(B) *Mochaik*, erasing

(A) *Kosaiv*

Writing is forbidden in any form, in any alphabet, whether it is written in ink or paint, black or color, engraved or embossed. To be considered written a minimum of two letters must be written. Otherwise, the Scriptural *Melacha* was not violated, though it is forbidden Rabbinically. This is due to *Chatzi Shiur*, a half of the Scriptural measure, being forbidden anyhow. Completing a word with one letter is a matter of Talmudic debate. We follow the view that it is not a violation of the Scriptural *Melacha*. To qualify for the Scriptural *Melacha*, the letters must be written in a manner that they will not dissipate by themselves, but will last a reasonable length of time. Therefore, while writing on one's skin is forbidden Scripturally, though it will eventually fade due to his body heat, writing on dust is not Scripturally forbidden.

By definition, a *Melacha* is a constructive, or creative, activity. It leads to a *Tikun*, improvement of some kind. The *Melachos* forbidden on Shabbos and Yomtov are derived from the activities necessary for the construction of the

Mishkan, the Tabernacle in the wilderness. In many cases, the Talmud debates the source of a Melacha in its Mishkan application. Writing, known to us as an obvious constructive activity, is not universally linked by the Talmud to a Mishkan activity. Instead, in debating the type of writing that is forbidden, one opinion cites the Mishkan activity as proof to his view.

The debate is on how many letters need to be written to be considered *Kosaiv*. One view is that two letters must be written, but they need not be different. Another view is that they must be different, and according to another view they must apparently form a word of some sort, or part of a word. One view, however, maintains that *Kosaiv* is merely a form of *Roshaim*, the Melacha of making an impression. This is the main Melacha. Therefore, even if the written letter does not resemble a readable letter in any language it is forbidden. As proof, he cites the Mishkan. He maintains that the writing in the Mishkan involved the boards that were lined up, both next to each other and with their sockets. Each board had to be placed in the same place within the structure when the Mishkan was reassembled at each encampment. Therefore, signs were made, such as a line or scratch drawn from one board to the next, to accurately reposition the boards later.

[Incidentally, *Mesaret* (or *Mesartet*), scratching, is considered a Melacha in its own right. This is when a mark is made on something to decide where it should be cut, folded, or where words should be written. Any such guideline is considered a Tikun and forbidden.]

The Poskim debate whether one may derive from here that the other opinions held be the Talmud sages debate the source of this activity or not. Do they agree that the Melacha is derived from the signs made on the boards, but disagree on what type of signs were made? Or do they maintain that the signs in question might have been made but can in no way be considered a Melacha? They are not written, and do not constitute the same type of Tikun. [In one view, the Melacha of *Roshaim* is independent of *Kosaiv* according to this Talmudic sage. The others consider only *Kosaiv* as the Melacha.] Rather the source is the other writing done for the construction of the Mishkan. This could have included calculations, both of plans and measurements and of the materials collected and distributed to the craftsmen. The letters of the *Alef-Bais* also served as numbers. This is how one can understand how doubling the same letter can be considered readable written words. The names of the *Shevatim*, twelve tribes of Israel, were engraved on the *Choshen*, breastplate and the *Avnei Shoham*, shoulder stones. Engraving is a form of writing.

Assuming that writing is derived from the boards, it would appear that if one

letter was written on one board and a second on its next door neighbor, putting the two together could also involve a Melacha. This would be the way the two letters would be connected in the Mishkan. However, due to the number of boards, it appears that the two letters were written on the same board. The writing, then, was what was done before the boards were connected. Connecting them was not considered writing them. Furthermore, we have already cited opinions that the Melacha is not derived from this activity. In addition, the Talmud, having forbidden Scripturally writing on two adjacent surfaces, discusses writing words on surfaces that are not possible to be connected, exempting them from the Scriptural violation. The issue is raised of writing on two surfaces that could be brought together. One is liable Scripturally, even though they are not presently adjacent. The act of bringing them together is not considered part of the writing process.

From here the Poskim show that taking two letters already written, and bringing them together, is not forbidden. However, if the letters are fixed in their new position, it is forbidden. Thus, playing certain word games, using cards or pieces, is permitted. If they are placed in frames or racks, it is forbidden. The same is true of charts used to show page numbers. If the letters are attached together, it is forbidden. If they are placed next to each other it is permissible.

The Poskim discuss eating cake which has lettering iced onto it. The issue is *Mochaik*, which will be discussed in the next section. For the purposes of the discussion in this section, we cite the main points. If the lettering is ink or paint, it is forbidden to cut through it. Eating it is also debated. If it is made of honey with fruit juice, i.e., icing, it is permitted. Nonetheless, some Poskim maintain that one may not cut through the words or letters. However, writing in this way is forbidden.

In our case the issue is different. The letters are already formed. They need only to be brought together. We have mentioned the prohibition on bringing letters together in a fixed fashion. Do the letters on a cake constitute this fixed fashion? Does it depend on the presence of cream or a sticky coating on the cake?

Actually, the issue is problematic from another perspective. The Poskim debate attaching silver letters to a *Paroches*, curtain on the *Aron Hakodesh*, unless one loosely pins them on in an unusual manner. Some Poskim differentiate between letters printed on a background, which may be placed next to each other (even, according to some, in a frame, such as in the little puzzle squares) and letters, such as those placed on a *Paroches*, with no background. Placing these on a background next to each other is like writing them onto the background. Accordingly, placing ready made sugar letters on a cream cake would be forbidden. [See Shabbos 103a-

b 104b, Gitin 20a, Poskim Tur Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 340:3, (Taz 2, Dagul Merevava, Magen Avraham 10, Mishneh Berurah, Aruch Hashulchan) commentaries. Chayei Adam 37, Nishmas Adam 6. Avnei Nezer O.C. 299. Chazon Ish O.C. 61:1. Shmiras Shabbos Kehilchasa 15 note 32*. Igros Moshe O.C. I:135.]

(B) Mochaik

Erasing is Scripturally forbidden when it is done as a preparation for writing. Rabbinically, it is forbidden when done for non-constructive purposes as well. Some Poskim maintain that while writing is only Scripturally forbidden with the right, or favored, hand, erasing with the left hand is as forbidden as with the right. The object is achieved either way. Anything that one is forbidden to write may not be erased. Accordingly, if a food has writing on it which was meant to be eaten and thus erased, it should be forbidden as well.

Thus, the issue of a decorated cake is raised by the Poskim. They cite a ruling forbidding breaking a cake with letters written on it (apparently breaking through the letters or words). Some maintain that the ruling applies to a special case. Eating is not a true form of erasing, since the Melacha is a by-product of a permissible activity. However, cakes were made with special words on them, to be eaten by children. These words were meant to have some sort of a charm effect, *Segulah*, on the children. In this case the children must eat through the words, and the Melacha can be considered somewhat intentional. Many other Poskim debate the arguments made to permit it. In any event, most Poskim maintain that only ink or paint is forbidden. Icing or words molded into the cake are excluded from this prohibition. Nonetheless, some forbid cutting through the words or letters, and only permit eating them. Some suggest lifting of the surface of the cake with a word on it, all in one piece.

In our case, especially when taking into account the discussion in section A, the lettering is no different. Not only would it be forbidden to cut through it, it would also be forbidden to lift off individual letters. Rather than making it more advantageous, it is more problematic. By lifting off the letter one removes it from its background, effectively erasing it. Accordingly, cutting through a word should be avoided. One could lift off a word with its background. [References as in section A. See also, Ketzos Hashulchan 144, Badei Hashulchan 3.]