

HALOCHOSCOPE

May one draw a picture of a half moon with the profile of a man on it? What if this is clearly a part of a large picture or group of pictures? If this is printed in a publication, may one keep such a picture in his possession?

The issues:

- (A) *Lo Saasun Iti*, the prohibition against creating images of celestial bodies
- (B) Which images of the moon are considered 'images'
- (C) Chashad, the prohibition against possessing something suspicious

(A) *Lo Saasun Iti*

The Torah forbids worshipping graven images, or anything other than Hashem Himself. The Torah also forbids forming certain images. The way this is expressed by the Torah is "*Lo Saasun Iti*, do not make 'with' Me, [gods of gold or silver]. The critical term 'with Me' is taken to forbid making images to be served on an equal basis with Hashem. However, the true meaning as explained by the Talmud is to forbid making images of the *Shamashim*, 'ministers' of Hashem, and the articles of holiness associated with service of Hashem.

There are three levels of this interpretation. On the lowest level, these *Shamashim* include the vessels and buildings of the *Mishkan* and *Bais Hamikdash*, tabernacle and temple. Thus, it is forbidden to reproduce a building with the likeness of the *Bais Hamikdash*, or of any part of it, or a vessels like those used in the temple service. If certain changes are incorporated, including different materials (with the exception of the *Menora*, which could be made of different materials) or a different scale (according to many *Poskim*) this is permitted. It is also permitted, as shall be seen, when it is made to use as a learning tool.

On the next level up, these *Shamashim* include images of the sun and the moon or any planets. These are considered celestial bodies that serve Hashem in the capacity of providing a service to the world as His agents. On the highest levels this refers to making an image of the Throne of Hashem, as described by the prophet Yechezkeil. This has four faces to it, that of a person a lion, a bull (or a cherub), and an eagle.

There is a separate interpretation, which is concurrent with the aforemen-

tioned. This revowels the word *Iti* to make it *Osi*. In the Hebrew these are spelled the same way. One may not make an image of Hashem. Hashem has no form, but the reference is to the way He appears to the prophets as a human. Thus, it is forbidden to form a human image.

With regard to images of any body or creation as the seal of a signet-ring, the Talmud refers to a distinction between an embossed, raised image or an engraved, sunken image. The image is meant to be a copy of a real life being. In real life the being is not engraved. Therefore, it is not forbidden in this form. Painting or drawing images with ink or paint is considered by most Poskim the equivalent of engraving. There is nothing raised above the surface. A minority consider them embossed, since they are actually imprinted on the paper or other surface. A further discussion ensues regarding photographs. In this case there is no single item raised above the surface of the page. The same should hold true of modern color printing. The entire page is coated with the ink.

However, this passage of Talmud does not refer to making the image, but to keeping it in one's possession. This will be discussed in the next section. In regard to making the image, there is no apparent distinction. Nonetheless, the Poskim debate the permissibility of making engraved images like this. Some permit them, based on the distinction mentioned regarding keeping such rings. Part of the basis for this is the Talmud's actual distinction. The Talmud says that if the ring is embossed, one may not keep it in his possession, but may use it to make a wax seal. The seal will be sunk into the wax. If the ring is engraved, it may be kept, but one may not seal with it. The waxen image will be raised. The other opinion maintains that only with regard to keeping in one's possession does the Talmud distinguish. Thus, it is forbidden to make these images even if they are not raised.

With regard to the sun and moon, there is no distinction between sunken and engraved images. The Talmud says that Raban Gamliel had images of the moon on his walls. The permissibility of these is then questioned, and then justified. These were obviously painted on a flat surface. They should have been permitted to keep since they were not raised. However, since in their natural visible form, these bodies are not raised (to the earthbound observer), even flat images are forbidden. This discussion centers on the permissibility of both making and keeping these images. Thus, we see that making such images is forbidden even if they are not raised. Keeping them is likewise forbidden.

Accordingly, it is forbidden to draw an image of a sun or of a moon, for decorative purposes. The Talmud reconciles the images that Raban Gamliel had

because they were made by gentiles for him (which answers how they could be made), that he was considered as though his pictures were public property. Publicly owned images do not raise the specter of suspicion. Since everybody knows that they are not being worshiped, there is no suspicion. Finally, the Talmud says that all images may be made for study purposes. These are meant as aids to Torah study and to ruling correctly on Torah questions.

thus, the prohibition applies when the image is made for decorative purposes, and certainly for religious purposes. To avoid violating this prohibition, two ideas are invoked. With regard to a human image, if the complete image is not made, the Poskim say it is permitted. This does not mean that a whole body must be created. Many Poskim forbid even a face or bust. The Talmud forbids keeping an arm that was found, if this is the complete image that was made. Idol-worshippers might have bowed down to it. However, an incomplete head, or one made in profile, is not forbidden. Accordingly, people rely on the same principle to draw a part of the sun or moon. The second idea is based on the resolution to an issue raised by the Poskim. The Talmud forbids making an image of the Throne, with four faces. The Talmud forbids making a single image of a human. Is the Throne, therefore, not already forbidden? No answer is that when made together with other images a human face would not be forbidden, unless those other images are the images on the Throne. Accordingly, the suggestion is made that the same would be true of the sun and the moon. If they are made, or drawn, as entities on their own, they are forbidden. If they appear as part of a larger group of images they would be permitted. However, this reasoning should only apply if they appear as a part of a picture. If the page has a lot of separate pictures, with no connection to each other, this should be forbidden.

In terms of the human face, we have already mentioned that an image that does not portray the entire face is permitted. Furthermore, this 'face' is ade in combination with the half-moon. [See Rosh Hashana 24a-b, Poskim. Tur Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 141:4-5, commentaries.]

(B) Images of the moon

However, there is a separate issue in this case. The Talmud discusses a prohibition against keeping or selling images that one finds in the street. If there is a possibility that they were worshipped, they are forbidden to benefit from. The same applies to vessels found with images painted on them. The Talmud uses examples of vessels with images of the sun or moon. The Poskim caution that this does not refer to images of the celestial sun or moon, but of images known to have been worshipped as representations of a sun-god or moon-god.

This would be a picture of a king sitting in a chariot with rays spreading from his head. For the sun this would be a full head with rays. It seems that for the moon this is a head with an arc in it. The arc represents the half moon. In some images, apparently, the face of the moon is only on the arc. This would be almost identical to the image of a profile half-moon.

Nowadays, though these are still drawn, they have no religious significance. Thus, it might not be considered forbidden to draw them at all. First, the restriction on drawing the celestial bodies refer to the actual sun and moon. Second, even though there might be a separate issue with regard to drawing an image that could be worshipped, this is not the actual image of the Avoda Zara. There is no complete picture of a king. In addition, the picture of the half moon does not have the other side of the circle. Accordingly, though it might be in poor taste, there is probably little restriction on such a drawing. However, this is all really speculation, since the Talmud and Poskim clearly forbid drawing the moon, and keeping such an image in one's possession. Since this image closely resembles a moon it is prudent to avoid drawing it and keeping it. The only situation where such images are not forbidden, is if vessels were found with them. They may be benefited from, i.e., sold for monetary gain, but the Poskim forbid keeping them.

(C) Chashad

The Talmud says that if one has an image in his possession, such as on a ring, he should destroy part of it. This will demonstrate his lack of interest in worshipping it. The Poskim explain that the Talmud had initially entertained the possibility that Chashad, suspicion is an issue with regard to the prohibition against making the images. However, the Talmud concludes that this is never an issue. Rather, the issue is only about the suspicion that the possessor worships the image. Accordingly, in our case, where the picture is on a printed publication, there is no such suspicion. There is certainly no suspicion that the owner drew the picture. [See Avoda Zara 42b-43b, Rosh Hashana 24b, Tos. Tur Sh. Ar. Y.D. 141:3-4, commentaries.]

However, the Poskim do not specify any instances where these restrictions are relaxed. Therefore, in conclusion, though it can not be shown clearly that there is anything wrong with this image, especially as part of a larger picture, such drawings should be discouraged.