

# HALOCHOSCOPE <sup>TOI</sup>

Sometimes people prepare for their Yomtov meals ahead. They then write a list of the foods that they plan on serving for the meals. What is the basis, if any, to permit reading a list of meal menus on Shabbos or Yomtov?

The issues:

- (A) *Mimtzo Cheftzecha*, the prohibition against mundane preoccupations on Shabbos, such as Mekach Umemkar, commercial activity
- (B) *Shtarei Hedyotos*; what reading is permitted or restricted on Shabbos?
- (C) *Cheftzei Shamayim*, and *Tzorech Mitzvah*, being preoccupied in the same way, but for the sake of a Mitzvah

## (A) *Mimtzo Cheftzecha Vedaber Davar*

Commercial activity is forbidden on Shabbos. This is at least a Rabbinical restriction, possibly one level stricter, but not fully Scriptural. There is a view that it was instituted by the Prophets, and is included in the meaning of a Passuk in Yeshaya 58: "... *Mimtzo Cheftzecha Vedaber Davar* ..." [... honor your Shabbos by refraining from ...] occupying yourself by checking into your affairs and discussing mundane words. This forbids conducting one's business on Shabbos, or talking about anything forbidden on Shabbos. Other authorities are of the opinion that it is a Rabbinic ordinance issued as a precaution against writing, which is forbidden Scripturally. Usually, records or receipts are written at the time of the transaction.

Included in *Vedaber Davar* are prohibitions against discussing mundane matters on Shabbos and discussing plans for after Shabbos. This applies primarily to activity forbidden on Shabbos. A Mitzvah which will involve a *Melacha* is a matter of debate by the Poskim. It has the advantage of being a Mitzvah, and the disadvantage of being a forbidden activity. It is most advisable to avoid talking about any plans for after Shabbos. Strictly speaking, one may think about his business on Shabbos or Yomtov. However, one should refrain from busying his thoughts like this, because it might detract from his *Oneg Shabbos*, the Mitzvah to enjoy Shabbos. In our case, one would be reviewing the menu for the next day of Yomtov, which, though not involving *Melacha*, is still forbidden, due to *Hachana*, one may not prepare on one day for the next day of Yomtov. [See

Yeshaya 58, Nechemia 13:17. Beitza 27b 37a, Tur Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 306-307.]

*(B) Shtarei Hedyotos*

“Mundane” documents may not be read on Shabbos. In one opinion this is part of the general restriction on mundane weekday activities, included in the Passuk Mimitzo Cheftzecha. Others consider it a separate precautionary Rabbinical decree, to avoid possible erasure. Erasing would be Scripturally forbidden.

Many Poskim do not consider *Igros Shalom*, casual, friendly correspondence, the restricted type of Shtarie Hedyotos. They are not documents and do not relate to any business activity. Nonetheless, there are a number of authorities who maintain that though *Igros Shalom* are not themselves Shtarei Hedyotos they are still restricted. This is either part of the original decree, or an extension thereof. Others maintain that there is no prohibition against reading *Igros Shalom*, particularly if there might possibly be important information in them that must be known immediately, such as lifesaving information.

Some matters that would otherwise sound mundane may be attended to on Shabbos. Examples include arranging a *Shiduch* or teaching children. Nonetheless, there is an opinion that forbids reading a letter containing information on such matters on Shabbos. Those who include Shtarie Hedyotos in the general category of Mimitzo Cheftzecha would explain it as a separate sub-category with its own rules. Though the main category does not apply in these cases, the rules of the sub-category do apply when it is dealt with in a letter. Others permit reading such letters, and according to some even if they arrive on Shabbos. Some permit reading them silently while forbidding handling them and reading them out loud. (They forbid handling them directly, due to their *Muktzah* status, but permit reading them while held by a gentile.)

The Talmud forbids reading captions under public displays, such as murals and statues. [Needless to say, this would include window shopping today.] Based on this the Poskim forbid reading secular books on history and any other subject, though one opinion permits it if they are written in *Lashon Hakodesh*, Hebrew. While on the subject, the Poskim discuss reading books that have no educational value, especially if their purpose is to appeal to certain emotions and to encourage undesirable and distasteful thoughts. These must be avoided during the week as well. They raise the issue of *Moshav Leitzim*, the soundly condemned practice of joining a group of scoffers. Newspapers pose their own set of problems, such as

when they arrive on Shabbos, when they include business related matters and advertisements. Though they also might contain important news items, and might provide a form of Oneg Shabbos, the matter is debated by the Poskim, with certain conditions laid down to permit limited reading.

The Talmud also forbids counting guests and their “*parparaos*” from a written list, and permits them only when done orally. The Talmud also forbids reading off a seating plan. Some translate *Parperaos* as their portions, while others translate it as their types of dishes, such as the main course, the side dishes etc. This would appear to be the very issue being raised in our question, reading menus. The reason for this prohibition is debated by the Talmud. One view considers it an extension of Shtarie Hedyotos, meaning that it is forbidden because something written on a piece of paper could be confused with a document. The other view considers it a precautionary decree against erasing, so that it is forbidden in its own right. The Talmud has a detailed discussion to determine the difference between the two reasons, and in which cases one or the other would not forbid it. The final conclusion is that as Shtarei Hedyotos it would not be forbidden on a slate, since it is not like a paper document, but would indeed be forbidden due to the concern about erasing. It would also be forbidden high up on a wall, where it would be too hard to erase if one wished to, since the decree was made without discriminating. However, if it is engraved on a wall which is out of reach, the Poskim permit reading it.

Why would reading any such thing be permitted in our case? Furthermore, the Poskim include in this restriction any kind of list, whether of names, such as a *Yizkor* list, or of any other item. The Poskim debate the permissibility of a waiter or banquet manager reading the lists. The host might find that he must make a last minute adjustment, due to the turnout or the availability of some of his food. He might be tempted to cross out and erase. Therefore, they maintain that the prohibition never applied to waiters. Some add that, the waiter must read the list to avoid embarrassing a guest or the host (which is what led to the destruction of the second *Bais Hamikdash*.) Based on this, some suggest that the case discussed by the Talmud refers specifically to a guest list and to a party, and not to a personal meal in one’s home. In this case, there would be no concern that a guest would not arrive, that an extra one would come, or that one more than expected would show up. As for menus, the homeowner has either prepared everything and must only access it, or has not yet prepared it (on Yomtov) and will have no need to erase anything.

In addition, the original prohibition applies to a situation where the host has written instructions for the waiters. When he reassesses the situation with regard to

guests and food, he might erase something so the waiter should not serve it, or erase a name (of one who did not come) so the waiter should not prepare the extra portion. Therefore, if the only person reading it is the hostess, who only wrote it as a reminder, but not as an instruction to someone else, it is not forbidden. [See Shabbos 116b 148b-149a, Poskim. Tur Sh. Ar. O.C. 307, especially 12, commentaries (Sh. Ar. Harav, Ar. Hash., Kaf Hachayim, etc.)]

### (C) *Cheftzei Shamayim*

The Talmud says that when the restriction on *Mimtzo Cheftzecha* is written, its intent is only to restrict one from minding his personal affairs, *Cheftzecha*. *Cheftzei Shamayim*, the affairs of Hashem, are permitted. This applies to a need for a *Mitzvah*, which must be done either on Shabbos, or according to some even for after Shabbos. This permits discussing *Tzedaka*, *Shiduchim* and the like, even when they include financial arrangements. Based on this, it is permitted to read *Yizkor* lists, since people donate *Tzedaka* for them. Based on this, some Poskim maintain that the restriction on reading lists (according to the view including it in *Shtarei Hedyotos*, and considering them an issue of *Cheftzecha*) is for a party with no *Mitzvah* purpose. *Hachnasas Orchim*, a great *Mitzvah*, is only considered a dispensation for our situation if the guests are from out of town, and not if they are one's local friends. Some suggest that *Tzorech Shabbos*, the needs of Shabbos and *Yomtov*, are also considered *Cheftzei Shamayim* to allow for a dispensation. The reason the Talmud's case is forbidden, despite the fact that it is on Shabbos, is that it refers to a party of invited guests, rather than to one's personal family Shabbos meal. It is more of a grand affair, involving plans and arrangements that are out of the ordinary. Therefore, there is both more concern for something going wrong, leading to erasing, and it is considered *Cheftzecha*, your affairs. Accordingly, even according to the view that forbids reading the lists as a category of *Mimtzo Cheftzecha*, our case is permitted. [See Shabbos 150a, Poskim. Tur Sh. Ar. O.C. 306:6, etc., commentaries.]

Obviously, even if we show that the case in question is not included in the restrictions cited by the Talmud and Poskim, one must nevertheless be on his guard not to cause himself new problems. Therefore, in conclusion, though one may read such lists, care should be taken to prevent the possibility of checking things off a checklist.

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