



Parshas Toldos 5764

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### Where did erasing take place in the Mishkan?

Erasing was one of the 39 *melachos* used in order to construct the *Mishkan*. The uniqueness of this *melacha* is that, together with a selected few other *melachot*, it is a destructive *melacha* in that it is not productive on its own. Although erasing is destructive, in the *Mishkan* it was utilized for constructive purposes: *Chazal* tell us that the beams of the *Mishkan* were numbered and if a wrong number was written on a beam, it would be **erased** in order to write the correct number. This is **constructive** erasing. Nowadays as well, in order for erasing to be a *melacha d'oraisso* it must be constructive.

### How many letters must one erase in order to be liable to bring a korban?

The *Melacha* of writing – כותב in the *Mishkan* was implemented in order to write on the beams. Consecutive numbers were written on the beams in order to remember the correct place for each beam. Hence the minimum requirement is the writing of two digits.<sup>1</sup> Since the *melacha* of erasing is the diametrical opposite of writing, it too consists of the erasing of two digits in order to replace the two errant digits.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One digit, number or letter is also an *issur d'oraisso* of שיעור but a *korban* is only brought for writing two digits.

<sup>2</sup> Even though theoretically it would be sufficient to erase one wrong digit and write the correct one in its

### Does the *melacha* only take place when **two digits** (or two letters) are erased?

The *Bi'ur Halacha*<sup>3</sup> says that the object of the *melacha* is to enable the writing of two letters and not the erasure *per se* of two letters. Consequently, erasing an ink blot, a smudge or basically anything large enough that occupies the space of two letters is an *issur d'oraisso*.

The *Bach*<sup>4</sup> holds that if an ink blot or wax falls onto letters obscuring them from sight and one erases the ink blot thus exposing the letters, he would be *chayav* on account of the *melacha* of writing.<sup>5</sup> It is likewise *ossur* to erase dirt pasted over even one letter or digit.

It seems that this was a practical problem. A scribe would sometimes write a *sefer Torah* by the light of a candle and occasionally wax would drip onto the *sefer Torah*. During the reading of the portion on Shabbos they would discover that some letters are covered in wax and are obscured from sight. Since it is a problem to “read” the Torah by heart

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stead and thus have two correct digits or letters adjacent to each other. Nevertheless *Chazal* say that erasing cannot be more severe than the main *melacha* of writing, which is two letters.

<sup>3</sup> *Simon* 340:3 ד"ה המוחק דיו.

<sup>4</sup> Mentioned in the *M"B* 340:10.

<sup>5</sup> The *Bi'ur Halacha* writes that the *Sh'vus Ya'akov* argues on the *Bach* and holds that there is no *issur* to expose hidden letters in this manner, but many *poskim* agree with the *Bach* and rule that one must follow the *Bach*.

they were obliged to remove the wax. The *Bach* holds, as mentioned, that it is a severe *issur* to do so. The *Mishna Berura* <sup>6</sup> rules that in such an event they must “read” those words by heart and not take out another *sefer Torah*.

*Could this scenario be applicable in the home as well?*

Yes, very easily. The *Bi'ur Halacha* <sup>7</sup> writes that if two pages are stuck to each other where letters are located, either with wax, dirt or glue, then separating the pages would be a problem of erasing. As many of us have experienced, the pages of a *bentcher* stick together at the letters with dried food, wine or such. Separating them generates this problem.

*If two letters in a sefer Torah are touching, may one erase the point where they touch?*

Two letters touching in a *sefer Torah*, *tefillin* or *mezuzos* render it *possul* and the letters must be corrected. <sup>8</sup> The *halachos* in such an event are many and the manner of correction depends on where the letters are touching. In certain cases it suffices to erase the point of contact.

In such a case, even though one is not erasing two letters or even an ink blot the size of two letters, nevertheless it is equivalent to the *melacha* of writing because by erasing the point of contact one is correcting the *sefer Torah*.

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<sup>6</sup> *Simon* 340:10. There are more complicated cases that may occur, see the *M”B* inside.

<sup>7</sup> ביאור הלכה ד"ה שעל הקלף.

<sup>8</sup> If one finds letters touching in a *sefer torah* during the reading, whether on Shabbos or on a weekday, taking out another *sefer torah* will depend on the point of contact.

## Vort on the Parsha

*Rashi* explains that when Yitzchak Avinu heard “Ya’akov - the supposed Eisav” utter the words “*Hashem* happened to bring the animals to me” he thought to himself that Eisav was not accustomed to mentioning *Hashem*’s name, and became suspicious. The *Ramban* explains that Yitzchak justified Eisav’s conduct of not mentioning *Hashem* because he was with animals in the fields and occasionally the situations were such that it was unfit to mention *Hashem*’s name. He therefore had accustomed himself, so Yitzchak Avinu presumed, not to mention *Hashem*’s name.

HaRav Sternbuch *shlita* points out that we see how careful one must be when mentioning *Hashem*’s name.

Uttering *Hashem*’s name must be accompanied with the commandment of **את ה' אלוהיך תירא**, you shall fear *Hashem*, which includes uttering His name with respect and deference. This is true for *davening*, *b'rachos* and all other occasions one mentions *Hashem*’s name.

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## Food For Thought

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

*Is there a problem eating cookies or cake with letters etched into them?*

*What about turning pages of a book with letters on the sides of the pages?*

*Is one permitted to draw shapes in a frosted window?*

Answers coming next week.

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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.