The Chicago Center
Mishna Berura Digest
THE DAILY RESOURCE FOR MISHNA BERURA YOMI
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סימן ל"ב סעיף ט"ז

Overview

Siman 32 Seif 16 (a):

If one of the letters becomes severed, meaning one of the straight letters, for example a "ו", a "ז" or a "ן" or something similar, **if a child who is not wise nor ignorant reads the letter correctly it is valid but if not it is invalid. When showing the letter to the child it is unnecessary to cover the other letters as is commonly done.** If we see that the letter lost its essential shape it is invalid even if a child reads it correctly.

- There are two ways a letter could be split. There could be a hole in the *klaf* or there may be missing דיו (M.B. 45).
- Taz explains that we refer to where the bottom part of the leg is severed and as a result is missing. In such a case the validity of the letter depends upon the correct reading of a child. If, however, the letter is severed in the middle but part of the letter below the split remains that additional part must be covered when determining the validity of the letter based on the reading of the child. (M.B. 48)
- Wise refers to a child who understands the context and as a result would figure out the correct letter to read but one who knows his letters well may be used to determine the validity of a letter. (M.B. 49)
- Ignorant refers to one who does not know his letters. (M.B. 50)
- Magen Avrohom in the name of Maharit maintains that one must cover the words that precede the word with the questionable letter. (M.B. 51)
- Having a child examine a letter is effective only when there is a question of whether the damaged letter retains its essential shape but if we see that a letter does not have its essential shape it is not valid even if a child reads it correctly. (M.B. 52)

Halacha Highlight

Having a child determine the validity of a letter

Shulchan Aruch Siman 32 Seif 16 (a)

אם תינוק שאינו לא חכם ולא טפש יודע לקרותו כשר

If a child who is neither wise nor ignorant reads it correctly it is valid.

Shulchan Aruch teaches that in circumstances when it is not clear if a straight letter has the minimal length one should show the letter to a child to determine whether the letter is valid. If the child reads the letter correctly the letter is valid but if the child reads the letter incorrectly the letter is invalid. In the event that the child read the letter correctly Mishnas Sofrim (אות תי"ו) writes that it is permitted to leave the letter as is without any correction. Mishnas HaSofer (סי' ו' סק"ה ובשעה"צ שם סק"י), however, writes that it is a good idea to make the repair since it may happen again in the future that one may be concerned that the letter is invalid and will not know that a child already looked at the letter and read it correctly.

The child that is qualified to examine letters is one who "is not wise and is not ignorant." Mishnah Berurah (ס"ק מ"ט) writes that wise refers to a child who reads and understands the content well enough that there is a concern that he will figure out from the context what letter should be written in this place. A child who is ignorant is one who does not know all of his letters well. This is assumed to be a child who is five or six and for this matter there is no difference between a boy or a girl (ע' פסקי תשובות אות כ"ד הע' 140). Since most children learn the aleph-bais using letters that appear differently that the *Ksav Ashuris* that is used in a Sefer Torah, one should show the child many different words that contain the letter that is in question. The concern is that the child may read the letter incorrectly because he is not accustomed to *Ksav Ashuris*. On the other hand one should not repeatedly show the child the same letter again and again since that will accustom the child to say that particular letter and when the questionable letter is shown to him he will instinctively read the correct letter.

Stories to Share

The Average Child

ש"ע ס' ל"ב, ט"ז: "אם תינוק דאינו חכם ולא טפש יודע לקרותו כשר..."

Rav Shraga Weiss heard that there were some refugees who were desperate to own tefillin. Since they were in camps where tefillin were virtually unattainable, this became a very serious problem since they couldn't even borrow. He immediately worked to find a way to procure them tefillin. Finally, he found parshios which could be used but had many questions about whether they were halachically valid.

When he went to the Chazon Ish, zt"l, to inquire whether the parshios were usable, the Chazon Ish didn't relate to his many questions. Instead, he looked at the parshios and raised a different problem with them. "Do you see this letter—the נ? It is not long enough and appears to be a vav, rendering it invalid."

But he was not satisfied with merely telling Rav Weiss that it was so. "Come into the other room," said the Chazon Ish.

In the kitchen the Chazon Ish took a knife and a match and laid the match next to the letter nun in the parshah. "You see?" he said as he etched out the length of the nun on the match, "I don't think it looks like a nun, more like a vav."

He then covered over the letters on both sides of the nun and asked me, "What do you think? What letter is this?"

Rav Weiss asked what practical difference what he though would have. "After all, as we find in Orach Chayim 32:16, we need a child who is not smart and not foolish to determine whether a questionable letter is valid or not?"

The Chazon Ish replied with an astounding chiddush, "Nowadays, since adults are not used to kesav stam, this halachah applies to your average adult. If it looks like a nun to you, that is enough to render this letter valid."

מעשה איש, ח"ג, ע' קכ"ג