The Chicago Center
Digest
Mishna Berura
THE DAILY RESOURCE FOR MISHNA BERURA YOMI
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סימן ל"ב סעיף כ'-כ"ג

Overview

Siman 32 Seif 20:

One must be careful regarding extra or missing letters because even a single missing or extra letter invalidates the parsha and the one who uses it is making a *beracha l'vatalah* every day and loses the mitzvah. The punishment for the scribe who does this is very great; therefore, one must excel in his *yiras Shamayim* and be particular in his observance of Hashem's words to be involved in writing and fixing *tefillin*.

- Mishnah Berurah quotes at length relevant comments of Levush that conclude with the call for those who can to be certain that the scribes are people of impeccable character. (M.B. 103)

Siman 32 Seif 21:

One should reread two or three times each parsha, carefully and meticulously, and then read it again before placing it in the *tefillin* to make sure that each parsha is placed in the correct compartment.

Siman 32 Seif 22:

It is advisable to test the quill before beginning to write to make sure that it does not contain too much ink and ruin the writing. One should also read everything one has written before writing Hashem's name so that one should not have to put the parsha into *genizah*.

- One should not write Hashem's name after dipping the quill in the ink; rather one should write the letter that precedes Hashem's name first to make sure that there is not too much ink on the quill or something else that would affect the writing. If additional ink is needed while writing the letters of Hashem's name one should dip the quill in another letter that is still moist but not in one of the letters of Hashem's name. (M.B. 107)

Stories to Share

Reviewing One's Work

ש"ע סי' ל"ב, כ"א: "כל פרשה אחר שיכתבנה יקראנה היטב בכונה..."

Rav Ovadya Yosef, zt"l, once gave a very vivid illustration of the importance of being careful and paying the price for better tefillin. "It is well known that sofrim who write cheap tefillin are not careful to fulfill all of the demands of the halachah. At one time, I checked into these tefillin and literally ninety percent of them were invalid.

"When someone once asked me to check his tefillin—which were obviously cheap—I saw that they were invalid a moment after I opened the parshios. Although I am not a sofer, the deficiency was not hard to spot. Anyone who was paying attention would never have missed it: the word ואהבת had been omitted! Finding this error is equivalent to one hundred witnesses attesting that no one even bothered to look over these parshios before they were inserted in the batim and sold.

"The halachah is that even if one letter is missing, the tefillin are invalid. And sometimes something can happen during the year to cause the tefillin to become invalid. This is why the custom of pious Jews is to send their tefillin in to be checked during Elul or between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This is how they determine that there is no blemish in their tefillin, since a blemish would render their blessings wasted and would mean that they had gone day after day without actually putting on tefillin.

"Although there is no halachic obligation to check tefillin which are in use every day since they are assumed to be kosher, one who is careful in this manner gives Hashem great satisfaction."

הליכות מוסר, ח"ב, ע' תתשכ"ט

Halacha Highlight

The G-d fearing scribe

Shulchan Aruch Siman 32 Seif 20

לכן צריך להיות מאד ירא שמים ... המתעסק בכתיבת תפלין ותקונן

Therefore one who is involved in writing and fixing *tefillin* must possess a high degree of fear of Hashem

Shulchan Aruch (סעי' כ') writes that one must be careful regarding extra or missing letters since an extra or missing letter invalidates the *tefillin*. Since it is so easy to make such a mistake, only those people who are G-d fearing and sensitive to the words of Hashem should be involved in writing and fixing *tefillin*. Mishnah Berurah (סי"ק ק"ג) quotes Levush at length who decries the practice to have young people write *tefillin* before they are qualified to do so. Inconclusion he writes that scribes should also have to demonstrate proficiency and a higher degree of fear of Hashem in order to be employed in this profession similar to the requirements to serve as a *shochet*.

Sometimes a person is forced to choose between two different scribes. One scribe demonstrates a greater degree of fear of Hashem but his writing is not so nice. A second scribe writes beautiful letters but does not possess the same degree of fear of Hashem. Which scribe is preferred? Piskei Teshuvos (אות ל"ד) cites authorities who maintain that it is preferable to obtain *parshiyos* written by the scribe who has greater fear of Hashem even though his writing is not the same quality.

A similar question is asked that involves another set of conflicting principles. A person is capable of writing his own *tefillin* or *mezuzah* but his writing is not so beautiful. He could also purchase *tefillin* or *mezuzos* written by a G-d fearing scribe who has a nicer handwriting. Is it preferable for a person to write his own *tefillin* and *mezuzos* based on the principle that it is preferable for a person to perform a mitzvah for himself rather than have it fulfilled by an agent, or perhaps he should obtain the nicer writing even though it was written by an agent. Piskei Teshuvos (אות ל"ד) cites authorities who ruled that it is preferable to obtain *tefillin* from the scribe who has a nicer handwriting than for one to write the *tefillin* for himself.