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Digest
Mishna Berura
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סימן קנ"ד סעיף ג'

Halacha Highlight

The status of the shulchan

Shulchan Aruch Siman 154 Seif 3
וכסא שנותנין עליו ספר תורה
And the chair upon which the sefer Torah is placed

Shulchan Aruch discusses the status of תשמישי קדשה—accessories to sacred items. He rules that even when these items become worn and are no longer usable they retain their sanctity and the proper method of disposal is to bury them. Rema explains that for an object to qualify as a תשמיש קדשה it must an object into which a sacred item is placed or something that is made to give honor to a sacred item. Tefillin covers are an example of the first category and the breastplate or crown that is placed on a sefer Torah is an example of the second category.

One of the items mentioned by Shulchan Aruch as a תשמיש קדשה is the "chair" upon which the sefer Torah is placed. Mishnah Berurah (סק"י) explains that this "chair" is the shulchan that stands on the bimah where the sefer Torah is placed for krias hatorah. Mishnah Berurah points out that seemingly the shulchan should not possess the sanctity of a תשמיש קדשה since the sefer Torah is placed on a cloth that rests on the shulchan. As such, the cloth is the תשמיש קדשה and the shulchan is a תשמיש דתשמיש דקדשה—an accessory of an accessory of a sacred item. He answers that since occasionally the sefer Torah is placed directly on the shulchan it has the status of a תשמיש קדשה and when it is no longer usable it must be buried. Sha'ar HaTzion (סק"ח) notes that nowadays it is not common for the sefer Torah to be placed directly on the shulchan, but nevertheless, since it happens that the cloth gets pulled from under the sefer Torah so that the sefer Torah is in direct contact with the shulchan it still maintains the status of a תשמיש קדשה. Later authorities (ע' פסקי תשובות אות ד' והע' 47) agree that nowadays since it is extremely rare that a sefer Torah would be placed on the shulchan directly, the shulchan has the status of a תשמיש דתשמיש דקדשה; therefore, if a Bais HaKnesses purchases a nicer Shulchan, the old one may be used for mundane purposes.

Stories to Share

The Photograph

ש"ע קנ"ד, ג': "ורצועות של תפילין..."

On today's amud we find that one must treat holy objects with respect. Even tefillin straps which are worn out must be left in genizah.

While walking through a fairly non-religious neighborhood in Israel one evening, a certain talmid chacham passed a photography studio. As he walked by, the proprietor burst out and exclaimed, "Please help us! There is a young man in the studio getting a picture of himself in tefillin and we can't seem to tie them right…"

"You mean you don't know how to tie tefillin properly?"

"Yes. And neither can the boy or his father," was the astonishing response.

The talmid chacham inquired where they had procured the tefillin.

"From a neighbor," was the reply.

The talmid chacham helped them put on the tefillin for the photograph but later had doubts about the entire matter. Since we must be so careful with the honor of tefillin, perhaps he should not have put them on the boy merely to take a picture? It was not as though night was the proper time to put them on l'chatchila. Maybe this constituted a disgrace to the tefillin and required an atonement?

He decided to consult with Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, shlit"a, regarding this question. Rav Zilberstein answered, "You definitely did right. I know of many baalei teshuvah who told me that even being photographed with tefillin at their bar mitzvah made an indelible impression on their receptive minds. Photographing such a young person with tefillin awakens a yearning within him to fulfill this mitzvah properly.

"Although night is not the proper time for tefillin, this is a rabbinic decree. Since this young man may never put tefillin on again, the least you can do is put it on him properly once in his life!"

ברכי נפשי, בראשית, עמוד תשל"א-תשל"ב

Overview

Siman 154 Seif 3:

Accessories of a sacred item, for example, the container for the sefer Torah, mezuzos, tefillin straps, the case in which a sefer Torah or chumash is stored or the chair upon which the sefer Torah rests, the curtains that hang in front of the heichal are sacred and must be buried. It is only those items in which sacred items are placed or if they are made to give honor to the sacred item, e.g. the cover that is on the boards of a sefer but a cover that is made to protect the cover that is on the sefer is not called an accessory, rather it is an accessory to an accessory and the same applies to all similar items. Some authorities maintain that to be considered an aron kodesh it must be a chest that is made to give honor to the Torah but an aron that is built into the wall for protection is not considered an accessory of a sacred item. Certainly if the sefarim become ruined as a result of being in a container it is permitted to take them from there. It is prohibited to launder the covering of a sefer Torah in urine out of respect.

- Accessories to sacred items retain sanctity even if they become worn and are no longer usable and that is the reason they must be buried. This applies to the accessory but something that is an accessory to an accessory is not sacred and may be used for non-sacred items even while still intact. (M.B. 6)
- Tefillin covers are also sacred. (M.B. 7)
- It refers to where it was designated as a chest for the sefer Torah even though it was used once or if it was not designated for that purpose but has been used regularly to store a sefer Torah. (M.B. 8)
- Our bookshelves are an accessory to an accessory since our sefarim have covers on them. Even though in a similar circumstance a container for a sefer Torah is sanctified it is because it is made to honor the sefer Torah as well. (M.B. 9)
- The "chair" refers to the table upon which the sefer Torah is placed for krias hatorah. Although the table is covered it is still an accessory to a sefer Torah since they sometimes place the Torah directly on the table. (M.B. 10)
- The ruling regarding the curtain applied in the time of the Gemara when they would sometimes wrap the sefer Torah inside but nowadays the curtain is only an accessory to an accessory. (M.B. 11)
- מקק, which is the rot that falls when a worm eats at a sefer, is also sacred. (M.B. 12)
- Shulchan Aruch refers to where they become worn and can no longer be used. (M.B. 13)
- If something touches the sacred item and provides some degree of protection or if it designed to give honor even though it does not touch the sacred item it is an accessory to a sacred item. (M.B. 14)
- Sefarim were put into a case and a covering was put on that case to beautify or honor the sefer and the covering is an accessory to the sacred item even though it does not touch it. (M.B. 15)
- Rema refers to where the hole provides protection but does not honor the sefer Torah. If they build a wood cabinet inside of the hole in the wall that cabinet is considered an accessory of a sacred item. (M.B. 16)
- In this case it is not an accessory since it is something that damages the sacred item. (M.B. 17)