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Digest
Mishna Berura
THE DAILY RESOURCE FOR MISHNA BERURA YOMI
Fri, Jul 12 2024 ■ ו' תמוז תשפ"ד
סימן ש"מ סעיף ד'

Halacha Highlight

Shoes with letters and invisible ink

Shulchan Aruch Siman 340 Seif 4 (a)
שלא לכתב באצבעו במשקין על השלחן
To not write with his finger with beverages on the table

Shulchan Aruch warns against writing with a liquid on a table or on ash. In other words, it is prohibited for one to dip his finger into juice and then used that wet finger to write on a table. Alternatively, if one moved his finger through ash or sand he will violate the prohibition. Mishnah Berurah adds that it is also prohibited for one to form the shape of letters with his finger on the frost of a window. In all of these cases, although he does not violate the Biblical prohibition against writing since it is not permanent, nevertheless, it is Rabbinically prohibited to write even if the writing is not permanent. If one has words or images carved into the sole of one's shoes so that when he walks on dirt or sand he leaves an impression of those words or images, Rav Nissim Karelitz (חוט שני ח"א פ"כ עמ' קנ"ח) writes that it is permitted to wear them on Shabbos. The reason it is not prohibited is that the one wearing the shoes does not intend to make an impression into the dirt or sand and it is not even inevitable that it will occur. Furthermore, since the impression does not provide anyone with benefit it lacks the basic character to constitute a *melacha* and thus is prohibited.

Poskim discuss whether it is permitted to write with invisible ink that becomes visible once the paper is exposed to heat. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (שולחן שלמה ס"ק י"ב) writes that if when the ink is first applied to the paper it does not leave a discernable mark, it is not Biblically prohibited. However, if it is discernable on the paper when first applied but becomes invisible once absorbed into the paper it is Biblically prohibited to write with such an ink. Pri Megadim (משב"ז סק"ג) rules that one who takes paper that contains invisible ink and brings it close to a heat source so that the letters appears has not violated the Biblical prohibition against writing but it is Rabbinically prohibited to do so since it so strongly resembles writing.

Overview

Siman 340 Seif 4 (a):

One must be careful and avoid writing with his finger with on a liquid or on dust but it is permitted to write what appears like letters in the air.

- This is Rabbinically prohibited even though it is not permanent. (M.B. 18)
- Authorities note that even if he wrote with a liquid on a material that does not allow his writing to be permanent, e.g., on a vegetable, it nevertheless is Rabbinically prohibited. (M.B. 19)
- He scratched letters with his finger onto dry dirt or sand. It is also prohibited to make letters on a window during the winter. If one formed letters on material that coagulates, e.g., blood or fat, the Tosefta implies that he is liable. (M.B. 20)
- We do not prohibit it even though he is moving his hands in the shape of the letter. (M.B. 21)
- It is also permitted to form the shape of a letter on a wet surface since the letter will not be discernable. (M.B. 22)
- One is not liable for writing unless it is permanent and the writing must be on a permanent surface but if one wrote with a liquid that does not leave a permanent mark or on a surface that is not permanent, he is exempt. Similarly, one is not liable for erasing unless he erased permanent ink from a permanent surface. Rabbinically, it is prohibited to write with an ink that is not permanent and on a non-permanent surface and the same is true regarding erasing. (Principles of Writing and Erasing 1)