

Stamped Books, Scrabble and Puzzles on Shabbos

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Since it is not lasting, this is not considered to be writing or erasing. This is also the basis for the ruling of the Magein Avraham⁸.

The Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch⁹ rules that opening and closing these books is permitted. His ruling is based on the rationale of the Ram"o and Ta"z of being מחוסר קריבה .

Two of the Melachos of Shabbos are; *Kosaiv* (writing) and *Mochaik* (erasing). In constructing the Mishkan, letters were written on adjacent beams so that they could be matched. If a letter was written mistakenly or incorrectly, it would need to be erased in order to write it correctly¹.

Stamped Page Edges

When books have stamps or writing along the side edges of the pages (as depicted above), may they be opened and closed on Shabbos? When the book is opened the letters are broken up. Does this constitute erasing? Similarly is closing the book considered writing?

This question applies not only to writing on the edges of the book but to pictures as well². Blotches or patterns are not of concern.

The Mordechai Yaffe, known as the Levush³, rules that one may not open or close such books on Shabbos. One who does so may even be violating Shabbos on a Biblical level, since it is inevitable that the writing will be broken or completed through opening and closing⁴.

Many Acharonim dispute the Levush's ruling.

The Ramo⁵ suggests multiple reasons to be lenient. His primary reason is that the letters are essentially written already. When the book is opened, the letters are just מחוסר קריבה –lacking being brought together. They are therefore theoretically viewed as remaining together and therefore nothing is being written or erased. This is also the basis for the lenient ruling of the Ta"z⁶.

The Perisha⁷ likens the opening and closing of a book to the opening and closing of a door. Since the door is made to be opened and closed, it is not considered building or destroying the wall as it is closed or opened respectively. Likewise, the pages of a book are made to be opened and closed regularly.

The Mishna Berura¹⁰ however is concerned for the stringent view of the Levush and rules that *Lechatchilah* such books may not be used. If no other Seforim are available and it will lead to *Bittul Torah*, one may rely on the lenient opinion.

The Avnei Nezer¹¹ is also stringent and distinguishes between placing fully formed letters next to one another which is permissible, and the opening and closing of the book which is effectively "forming" the letters and therefore forbidden.

This argument has further application in many practical Halocha scenarios.

Torn Pages

Sometimes a Siddur or Sefer will have a ripped page. Is one allowed to push the sides of the page together to be able to decipher the words?

According to the opinion of the Ta"z and Alter Rebbe this is also just מחוסר קריבה and therefore permissible¹². According to the Mishna Berura one should not do so¹³.

Paroches with Writing

A Paroches which opens in the middle and has writing which becomes separated by opening, is also subject to the Machlokes above.

According to the Alter Rebbe, Ta"z and Magein Avraham, the Paroches may be opened, since the letters are only מחוסר קריבה.

Scrabble

According to the view of the Mishna Berura, one may not play scrabble on Shabbos since the forming of the words by placing the letter-pieces next to one another constitutes writing. Dismantling the words would be erasing.

However according to the Alter Rebbe (based on the Ta"z and Ram"o), since the letters are already written and one is merely placing them together, this does not constitute writing and is permitted. Since the letters are already formed,

the Avnei Nezer would concur. Note that some Poskim raise a separate concern that one may come to write down the score.

Puzzles

Assembling or dismantling picture-puzzles on Shabbos would be subject to the same Machlokes. According to the Alter Rebbe, the picture is already formed but just lacking joining together and therefore permissible. According to the Mishna Berura, puzzles should be avoided, although one could be lenient for young children.

A Fundamental Exception

The Alter Rebbe¹⁴ rules that if one pins or hooks silver letters onto a garment, it is considered writing. At first glance, this seems to contradict the cases above where the letters were already formed but were just lacking קריבה and therefore permissible. So why is it problematic?

The difference must be, that when the letters become firmly attached in place, it remains forbidden¹⁵.

Therefore, travel scrabble boards which have a grid (or is magnetic) to hold the letters in place should not be used. Similarly if the puzzle base has an inset border which holds the pieces together, or if the puzzle pieces interlock even semi-firmly, they should not be used even according to the lenient opinion of the Alter Rebbe. ■

¹ Shabbos 73b

² Magein Avraham and Ketzos Hashulchan.

³ O.C. 340:4

⁴ Ta"z 340:2 challenges that the Melacha is unintended (אינו מתכוין) and should not be Biblical prohibition. See however Avnei Nezer that the Melacha is inevitable (פסיק רישא) and therefore Biblically forbidden. The Levush follows the position of the Rambam that a מלאכה לגופה שאינה צריכה לגופה is Biblically forbidden.

⁵ Teshuvos Simon 119

⁶ O.C. 340:2

⁷ Beginning of O.C. Simon 340

⁸ O.C. 340:6

⁹ O.C. 340:4. This is also the view of the Elya Rabbah, Chok Yaakov and Tosefos Shabbos.

¹⁰ O.C. 340:17

¹¹ Simon 210

¹² In this case, the Magein Avraham would also rule stringently, since unlike the stamp of the side of the books, the torn page is not made to be opened and closed like a door.

¹³ According to the Avnei Nezer, since the letters themselves are being completed, this would be forbidden.

¹⁴ O.C. 340:9

¹⁵ See Magein Avraham O.C. 340:10 with Machatzis Hashekel. See also Igros Moshe O.C. 1:135