

SHE'AILOS U'TESHUVOS

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

QUESTION: If one wishes to change the status of pots or cutlery from meat to dairy or vice-versa through the koshering process known as hagalah, may he do so?

DISCUSSION: According to the basic halachah, it is permitted to change the designation of a utensil from meat or dairy (or vice-versa) through hagalah. Since hagalah, when performed correctly,(1) purges the "taste" which has been absorbed into the utensil, the utensil is now halachically considered "new" and may be used for either meat or dairy, regardless of how it was used previously. It is, however, a long-standing and widely practiced custom(2) not to do so l'chatchilah, since the Rabbis were concerned that people would "get away" with one set of utensils which they would constantly "kosher" from dairy to meat and back again, causing mix-ups and confusion.(3) Still, under special circumstances, the poskim allow for certain exceptions and permit changing the designation of utensils from meat to dairy or vice versa even l'chatchilah. Some of those special cases are the following:

- * Under extenuating circumstances, if no other dishes are available.(4)
- * If the utensil was rendered non-kosher and must undergo hagalah in any case. It is even l'chatchilah permitted to render the utensil non-kosher with the express intent of koshering it in order to change its designation. (5)
- * If the utensil is being koshered for Pesach.(6)
- * If the utensil was not used for 12 months.(7)
- * If the utensil is being sold or given as a gift.(8)
- * If the utensil is being koshered from meat or dairy to parve use - even if later on it will be used for the opposite designation from its original one.(9)

QUESTION: Is it halachically permitted to read newspapers published by and for the religious community on Shabbos [and Yom Tov]?

DISCUSSION: It depends which section of the paper one wishes to read:

- * Business and classified advertisements, business news which bears on the reader's finances or shopping needs or plans, consumer columns, gardening and housekeeping advice, recipes and cooking instructions - are all strictly forbidden to be read on Shabbos.(10)

* Stories of personal or public tragedies, death notices or eulogies that could bring a person to tears, holocaust stories that sadden a person and detract from his oneg Shabbos - may not be read on Shabbos.(11)

* Divrei Torah - including all articles pertaining to Torah learning, essays on the weekly Parashah, Halachah, Mussar, Hashkafah, stories and pictures of gedolei Yisrael, stories of chizuk ha-Torah, middos tovos and yira'as shamayim - all of these are permitted to be read on Shabbos, provided that one makes a conscious effort not to read the forbidden parts of the newspaper.(12)

QUESTION: Is it permitted to read the general news section of the newspaper on Shabbos [and Yom Tov]?

DISCUSSION: Reading the general news section of the newspaper - including news, politics or stories of general interest, and advertisement or business news that have no bearing on the finances or shopping needs or plans of the reader, are a subject of dispute among the poskim. We find three basic opinions:

* Many hold that reading this type of material is included in the Rabbinical edict against reading non-business documents and is forbidden to be read.(13)

* Others hold that if one enjoys reading these type of articles then it is permitted to do so. These poskim maintain that the Rabbinical edict against reading non-business documents does not include enjoyable reading material.(14) Mishnah Berurah, however, does not support this position.(15)

* Some poskim hold that while it may be permitted to read certain parts of the newspaper, reading a newspaper should be strongly discouraged since it is extremely difficult to avoid the advertisements or other parts of the paper which are forbidden to be read.(16) But other poskim, however, permit the reading of a newspaper as long as one makes a conscious effort to avoid the forbidden sections.(17)

The following is a free translation of guidelines given by Harav N. Karelitz(18) on this subject: "While a ben Torah and his family should avoid reading a newspaper on Shabbos altogether, we do not object to those who are lenient and read the permissible parts of the newspaper. This is especially true with regard to women, children and those who do not engage in the study of Torah [who require a kosher alternative so that they will not come to engage in idle or forbidden talk or worse]; we definitely should not object to their reading the permissible parts of the newspaper."

One should consult his halachic authority for guidance as to how he should conduct himself in this matter.

QUESTION: Is it permitted to read secular books on Shabbos [and Yom Tov]?

DISCUSSION: It depends on the type of book one wishes to read:(19)

* Biographies of gedolei Yisrael or Orthodox community leaders, Jewish story books that serve to strengthen one's yira'as shamayim, emunas chachamim or middos tovos are permitted, including

works of fiction (novels and mysteries) which are authored by G-d fearing Jews and are written for these purposes.

* Books [or encyclopedias] on science, math, medicine, geography, astronomy and architecture are permitted,(20) except if one is reading them for the sake of his business or profession,(21) or only because he needs to study for a test.(22)

* Cookbooks should be avoided.(23)

* Secular books which do not contain halachically objectionable material, but were not written by G-d fearing Jews for the purpose of strengthening one's yira'as shamayim, emunas chachamim or middos tovos, should not be read on Shabbos.(24) We do not, however, object to women, children or those who are not engaged in the study of Torah reading books of this nature on Shabbos.(25)

* Books about personal or public tragedies, or holocaust stories that sadden a person and detract from his oneg Shabbos - may not be read on Shabbos.(26)

* Any written work that may have a bearing on the reader's finances is forbidden to be read on Shabbos.

FOOTNOTES:

1 See The Weekly Halachah Discussion, pg. 279-286 for more information.

2 Among Ashkenazim - Sefaradim have not accepted this custom; Kaf ha- Chayim O.C. 509:45. See also Peri Chadash Y.D. 97:1 and Aruch ha-Shulchan Y.D. 89:17 and 121:11 who rejects this custom completely.

3 Magen Avraham O.C. 509:11. See Sha'ar ha-Melech, Hilchos Yom Tov 4:8, for an additional concern.

4 Peri Megadim (Aishel) O.C. 452:13.

5 Mishnah Berurah 509:25.

6 Mishnah Berurah 451:19.

7 Maharsham 2:241, quoting Aishel Avraham of Butchash.

8 Lecham ha-Panim Y.D. 121, quoted by Darkei Teshuvah 121:59. See also Be'er Moshe 3:105.

9 Darkei Teshuvah 121:59.

10 Mishnah Berurah 307:63.

11 Mishnah Berurah 307:3; Ketzos ha-Shulchan 107:43.

12 See Avnei Yashfei 1:76-3, quoting Harav S.Z. Auerbach; Az Nidberu 9:7.

13 Many poskim, based on O.C. 307:16. See Minchas Shabbos 90:22.

14 See Magen Avraham 301:4 and Peri Megadim; Ya'avatz 1:162; Kalkeles Shabbos 33; Tehillah l'David 301:1; Da'as Torah 307:15.

15 Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 301:7.

16 Mishnah Berurah 307:63.

17 See Da'as Torah 307:16, Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 29:46. See also Igros Moshe O.C. 5:22-3 who writes that business newspapers should not be read.

18 Ayil Meshulash on Shitrei Hedyotos, pg. 79, 83 and 210, and in Menuchah Shleimah, 2.

19 Although this discussion follows the same basic principles quoted earlier concerning newspapers, there are several reasons why there is greater leniency regarding the reading of books than of newspapers: 1) Books do not contain advertisements or financial news; 2) The Rabbinic ban against reading non-business related items, which became necessary due to the confusion between different type of documents, may not apply to books since there is a clear distinction between unbound business documents and bound books; see Pischei She'arim on Sha'arei Efrayim 10:33.

20 Mishnah Berurah 307:65 and 308:164.

21 Shulchan Shelomo 307:25.

22 See Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 28, note 206, where Harav S.Z. Auerbach remains undecided on this issue.

23 Harav M. Feinstein and Harav N. Karelitz quoted in Ayil Meshulash, pg. 41. Others are more lenient; see Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 29, note 116 and Avnei Yashfei 1:76.

24 O.C. 307:16.

25 Ruling of Harav N. Karelitz (quoted in Ayil Meshulash on Shitrei Hedyotos, pg. 209, and in Menuchah Shleimah, 2).

26 Mishnah Berurah 307:3; Ketzos ha-Shulchan 107:43.

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