

A SEVEN-BRANCHED CANDELABRUM

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Question: In view of the Biblical prohibition against replicating vessels that were used in the Mishkan, would one be allowed to make a seven-branched candelabrum? If one owns such a candelabrum, is he allowed to keep it?

Discussion: The Talmud^[1] forbids fashioning [or owning^[2]] a seven-branched menorah, in keeping with the Biblical^[3] prohibition^[4] of "imitating" any of the vessels (keilim) that were used in the Mishkan. There are three views in the early authorities as to the extent of the prohibition:

1. Only an exact replica is prohibited—any deviation from the original in the Mishkan is permitted^[5].
2. Any Menorah which would have been considered kosher b'diavad in the Mishkan is prohibited^[6].
3. Any seven-branched menorah, made out of any metal, regardless of its shape or form, is prohibited^[7].

Shulchan Aruch^[8] (as explained by the Shach) rules in accordance with the middle view, i.e., that a candelabrum that is not made exactly like the one in the Mishkan but would be kosher b'diavad is prohibited. He rules, therefore, that even if the candelabrum is not made from gold but from other types of metals; if the replica is made without the decorative cups, knobs, or flowers that were part of the original Menorah; if the candelabrum is shorter than the eighteen tefachim (approx. six feet) that the original Menorah measured—it is still prohibited. But a seven-branched candelabrum made out of wood or porcelain, for instance, is permitted since even b'diavad such a Menorah is invalid for use in the Mishkan. Similarly, a menorah which is made to hold candles and not oil would be permitted since such a Menorah could not be used in the Mishkan either^[9]. Several latter-day poskim rule in accordance with this view^[10].

There is, however, a minority view that recommends following the third—more stringent—approach, and forbids making or owning a menorah which would not have been considered kosher even b'diavad. In their opinion, it is forbidden to make any candelabrum, no matter what its shape or form, if it has seven branches. Even a menorah which is made to hold candles and not oil would be prohibited. A menorah which is round or square would also be prohibited^[11].

Although the basic halachah follows the more lenient opinion, some poskim suggest that since this prohibition is of Biblical origin, we should be stringent^[12]. L'chatchilah, therefore, one should not make [or own] any seven-branched^[13] candelabrum, either oil- or candle-based, made in any shape or out of any metal^[14]. Some poskim forbid even a seven-branched electric candelabrum^[15], while others permit it^[16]. While it is best to refrain from making one, if one happens to have such a menorah, it is permitted to retain it^[17].

The poskim agree that one who owns a seven-branched candelabrum could "fix" it by either adding or removing a branch^[18], or by merely capping one of the branches^[19]. But it is questionable if one may retain an eight-branched candelabrum from which one branch accidentally broke off^[20].

1. *Rosh ha-Shanah 24a*.

2. *Beur ha-Gra*, Y.D. 141:21; *Birkei Yosef*, Y.D. 141:8. See *Darchei Teshuvah* 141:52 for a more lenient opinion.

3. *Tosafos*, *Avodah Zarah* 43b.

4. *Yisro* 20:20.

5. *Teshuvos Chacham Tzvi* 60. See also *Meiri* (*Rosh ha-Shanah 24a*) who opines that any deviation from the Menorah of the Mishkan is permitted.

6. *Teshuvos Maharik* 75, in explanation of the view of *Tosafos*.

7. *Bechor Shor* (*Rosh ha-Shanah*, 24a.)

8. Y.D. 141:8.

9. *Mishnas Chachamim*, quoted by *Pischei Teshuvah*, Y.D. 141:14.

10. *Darchei Teshuvah* 141:56, quoting several poskim; *Igros Moshe*, Y.D. 3:33; *Yabia Omer* 1:12 and *Yechaveh Da'as* 3:61. [Rav Yosef (*ibid.*) questions whether or not it is permitted according to this view to make an oil menorah which cannot hold the required minimum of half a lug.]

11. *Pischei Teshuvah*, Y.D. 141:14-15; *Sho'el u'Meishiv Kama* 3:71, quoted in *Darchei Teshuvah* 141:56; *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 168:5. Note that *Bechor Shor* writes that even according to the view of the *Shulchan Aruch* (the middle view), a round menorah would be prohibited, since a round Menorah may be kosher b'diavad for use in the Mishkan.

12. *Halichos Shelomo*, vol. 2, 15 note 13.

13. But any candelabrum with six, eight, or nine branches may be made and kept in one's possession.

14. See *Toras Chayim*, pg. 120, that Rav Y.C. Sonenfeld recommends that l'chatchilah, even a wood or porcelain menorah should be avoided.

15. Shearim Metzuyanim b'Halachah 168:4 quoting Chavalim ba-Ne'imim 3:54; Yaskil Avdi 7:16.
16. Ma'archei Lev, pg. 484; Mishpatei Uziel (tanina, Y.D. 18).
17. See Yabia Omer 1:12 Yechaveh Da'as 3:61.
18. Birkei Yosef, Y.D. 141:8, quoted by Darchei Teshuvah 141:52.
19. Rav C. Kanievsky (Halichos Chayim, vol. 2, pg. 118).
20. See Darchei Teshuvah 141:53.

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