

Seamus O'Braille

Q May I discard an old siddur written in Braille, or must it be put in *sheimos*?



A The Torah warns (Devarim 12:4), “*Lo sa’asun kein lashem elokeichem*”

(Do not do so to Hashem your G-d). This *pasuk* follows the mitzvah of eradicating idols, and it forbids destroying an inscription of Hashem’s name. But the Shach (Y.D. 179:11) writes that the Torah only forbids erasing a Divine name if it’s written in Hebrew. (Even in another language, he says it shouldn’t be erased unnecessarily; see below.) R’ Chaim Ozer Grodzensky (Achiezer 3:32) adopts the Shach’s ruling.

On the other hand, a Hebrew word written in Braille might be viewed as Hebrew. The lettering may be foreign, but the word is *lashon hakodesh* because the dots represent the letters of the Hebrew aleph-bais.

Yet the *poskim* debate whether even script Hebrew is considered Hebrew writing, given that the letters have a different form (see the comprehensive discussion in Yabia Omer Vol. 4 Y.D. 20:5). Those with the lenient view would certainly extend it to Braille. But even the stringent opinion may view Braille more leniently: Script letters are accepted universally as a way of writing, so they represent aleph-bais, even if their appearance differs. Braille, however, is undecipherable to most Hebrew readers, so arguably it never evolved into a substitute for Hebrew letters. (If someone were to invent his own new aleph-bais characters and inscribe Hashem’s name, erasing it certainly poses no *de’Oreisa* violation.) The Chelkas Yaakov (O.C. 124), though, doesn’t follow this reasoning, as he clearly equates Braille with regular aleph-bais letters and forbids erasing a Braille inscription of Hashem’s name.

Still, even in cases where the *de’Oreisa* prohibition doesn’t apply, *poskim* say that one must still give proper honor to Hashem’s name and to Torah inscriptions and avoid degrading them. R’ Yitzchak Zilberstein (Chashukei

Chemed, Sanhedrin 21b) says that Braille *sfarim* should be placed in *sheimos*.