

The Jig Is Up

December 21, 2023

Q May children solve jigsaw puzzles on Shabbos?



A The early *poskim* debate whether opening and closing a book that has words written on its page edges violates *mocheik* and *koseiv* (erasing and writing) on Shabbos, because bringing together that separated parts of the letters may constitute *koseiv*, and separating them may be *mocheik* (Magein Avraham 340:6 et al.).

Others argue that closing the book is not *koseiv*, because the restored letters already existed and they are only united temporarily; and *mocheik* is not applicable because the letters aren't destroyed, only separated, and they can easily be rejoined (Shu"t Rama 119). The Mishnah Brurah (340:17) concludes that one may rely on the Rama's view, but he should preferably choose a different book.

This debate is applicable to jigsaw puzzles, because drawing a picture is included in *koseiv*. According to the Mishnah Brurah's conclusion, one may rely on the Rama's view for children under bar mitzvah even *lechat'chilah*. But this only concerns puzzles whose pieces connect loosely; if they interlock tightly, or if they are fitted snugly into a frame, all agree that it may not be assembled, because it is more permanent (Shmiras Shabbos Kehilchasah 16:24).

If each puzzle piece depicts a full letter or picture, and assembling them is required only to form a full word or a picture collage, one may be lenient for children even if the pieces are joined tightly (Piskei Teshuvos 340:19).

If the puzzle is assembled, even loosely, with the intention of keeping it that way permanently, it should not be done on Shabbos even by children.

Borer (selecting) is generally not an issue with puzzles, because the three permitting conditions (see O.C. 319:1) are met: a) the selecting is done by hand, b) the desired piece is removed from the pile of undesired ones, and c) the selected piece is used right away.