



Erasing on Shabbat

1. Many poskim permit eating cake that has writing on it but forbid breaking the letters when cutting the cake, while others permit breaking the letters as well.¹
2. It is permitted to open a book on Shabbat even though it has letters on the side; if, however, there is another similar book available without letters on the side, one should use that one.²
3. The Ashkenazic custom is to avoid ripping letters when opening a package on Shabbat, while the Sephardic custom is to be lenient in this issue.³

1. The Mordechai (Shabbat 369) cites the Maharam as ruling that on Yom Tov, it is rabbinically forbidden to eat cake that has letters written on it. He explains that it only is a rabbinic prohibition because one is erasing without intending to write in the place where he just erased. This is codified in the context of Shabbat by the Rama (O.C. 340:3).

The Dagul Meirvavah 340 argues that eating the cake should be permitted, since it is only a psik reisha of a rabbinic prohibition that anyway is being done in an abnormal way. He asserts that breaking letters on a cake is an abnormal way of erasing, and certainly breaking the letters in one's mouth is unusual. Rav Ovadia Yosef (Yabia Omer O.C. 4:38) adds that it should be permitted because it is only a psik riesha d'lo nicha lei on a rabbinic prohibition. Rav Mordechai Willig ("Hilchos Shabbos - Kotev/Mocheik #2," min 39-43), however, argues that there is room to distinguish between a gezeirah, where psik riesha d'lo nicha lei may apply, and an action that is only d'rabanan because of a general principle, such as doing something in a destructive manner, where such a leniency doesn't apply.

The Taz 340:2 also permits because the letters are being broken for the purpose of eating, a leniency found regarding to Borer and Tochen. The Chazon Ish (O.C. 61), however, answers that since chewing and eating always involve Borer and Tochen it is permitted even immediately prior to eating. No such permission was given in the context of erasing.

Kitzur S"A 80:63 and Aruch HaShulchan 340:23 are lenient, while the Mishna Brurah 340:17 and Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata 11:7 permit only breaking the letters in one's mouth, not cutting them with one's hands prior to eating. Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky ("Hilchos Shabbos Series Mocheik Removing Letters from a cake" min 15-6) states that the minhag to be strict for the Rama is only a chumra.

2. Levush 340:4 writes that it is forbidden to open or close a book with letters written on the side because when one opens the book, the letters are broken and

when the book is closed the letters are reformed. He adds that perhaps there is a biblical prohibition, since erasing, accomplished by opening of the book, is done with the intent of later writing in that place when closing the book.

The Rama in a teshuva (119), however, is lenient based on the Gemara Shabbat (104b) that says that there is a biblical prohibition if a person writes one letter in Tiveriya and one in Tzipori because it is not considered lacking a significant action to bring them together. The Rama infers that moving letters closer to or further from one another is not considered writing or erasing. Similarly, opening the book doesn't erase the letters, but merely separates the parts of the letters, and closing the book doesn't write the letters, but just combines the halves.

The Avnei Neizer 210:1-3 rejects this proof. He argues that separating two letters isn't considered erasing because the letters still exist, but splitting letters horizontally is considered erasing because the letters become nonexistent. See Rama (ibid.) and Taz 340:2 for resolutions to this difficulty.

Mishna Brurah 340:17 comments that the minhag is to follow the Rama, yet if one has another sefer without letters on the side, he should use that one instead. Rav Hershel Schachter (oral communication) said that it is only a chumra to follow the Levush, because the letters only appear to be written when the book is closed.

3. Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata 9:13 (quoting Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach) rules it is only rabbinically forbidden to rip through letters when opening a package, as is not considered erasing in order to write. Rav Hershel Schachter (oral communication) agreed.

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky (ibid. min 18) explains that strictly speaking, it should be permitted to tear through letters for the same reasons that the Dagul Meirvavah permitted cutting letters on a cake. The minhag, though, is to be strict. Yalkut Yosef (Shabbat vol 5, p. 117) permits tearing through letters because it is a psik reisha d'lo nicha lei on a rabbinic prohibition.