

The Silk Screen Sefer Torah

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Over a decade ago, a new method of writing *Sifrei Torah* using silk screen was introduced. The project was met with fierce resistance and many contemporary rabbis prohibited its use. Much confusion surrounded the topic, and many questions were left unanswered. After a while things quieted down, and not much has been heard since then. The goal of this article is to clarify how a silk screen *Sefer Torah* is produced; discuss the halachic ramifications; explain why it was so strongly opposed; and describe the end result.

1. What Is a Silk Screen *Sefer Torah*?

A silk screen *Sefer Torah* is written using screen printing technology. The process begins by taking kosher *klaf* (parchment paper) that has *sirtut* (lines etched into the *klaf*) in accordance with halachah and placing it on a table or other flat surface. A silk screen frame is then placed above the *klaf*, leaving about a quarter inch between the *klaf* and the screen. The screen covers an entire *yeria* (page). The screen consists of a wooden or metal frame and has a thin mesh sheet stretched over it. The mesh is woven very tightly, leaving millions of tiny holes between the mesh fibers. The holes are so small that ink placed on the screen does not drip through. The screen is covered with a thin coating known as emulsion, blocking the holes and preventing them from being filled with ink. The holes that correspond to the letters that need to be written in the *Sefer Torah* are left open. Every letter in the *Sefer Torah* is represented by hundreds of tiny holes that were not covered over, forming the shape of the letter. There are forty-two lines on every screen just like in any standard *Sefer Torah*, and a clear beautiful font is chosen and meticulously checked for any mistakes.

Ink is then placed on the left side of the screen. The ink used is a bit thicker than the regular ink used in most *Sifrei Torah*. The *sofer* pushes the ink across the screen from left to right with a squeegee filling the holes with ink. At this stage the letters are formed on the screen but no ink drips down onto the *klaf*. The *sofer* then says he is writing *lishmah* (for the sanctity of the *Sefer Torah*), is *mekadesh* (sanctifies) the names of Hashem and pushes the ink from right to left across the screen with a squeegee. As the

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sofer moves the squeegee across the screen, he applies pressure to the squeegee, pressing the screen down onto the *klaf*. As the ink is being pushed across the screen, the ink is forced through the tiny holes and pushed directly onto the *klaf* below. The letters are written directly by the *koach* (effort) of the *sofer* pushing the ink onto the *klaf*. The entire *yeria* is written instantly (*toch kedey dibur*). The final product is a *Sefer Torah* written in a beautiful *ksav* (font).¹

2. What is the Point in Making Them?

A number of benefits are achieved by writing silk screen *Sifrei Torah*:

1. The *Shulchan Aruch* (Y”D 270:1) writes that there is a positive commandment for every Jew to write a *Sefer Torah*. The *Tur* (ibid.) writes that if he wrote [the *Sefer Torah*] or even edited one letter it is as if he received it on Mt. Sinai. The *Beis Yosef* explains: ‘If he wrote it’—He himself or hired a *sofer* to write it and worked hard so that it should be written correctly, it is as if he received it on Mt. Sinai, etc. The *Rosh* (*Hilchos Sefer Torah* 1, see *Beis Yosef* Y”D 270) explains that the main purpose of the commandment of writing a *Sefer Torah* is to learn from it. (Not to store it in *shul*.) This means that even if the local community or *shul* does not need another *Sefer Torah*, it is a mitzvah to write one and use it for learning. (Many people are *maavir sidrah* from their personal *Sefer Torah*.)
2. Many *shuls*, especially in places like hospitals and hotels or small settlements, have non-kosher *Sifrei Torah*. This is especially common with old *Sifrei Torah*. They continue to be used and lead to *berachos* recited in vain.
3. Unfortunately there are many non-God-fearing *soferim* who are unscrupulous and don’t follow the halachos properly, leading to non-kosher *Sifrei Torah* being sold to unsuspecting buyers.

¹ I wish to acknowledge the role played by Rabbi Yosef Tesler in developing the silk screen *Sefer Torah* process. With Rabbi Yitzchak Abadi’s urging and guidance, Rabbi Tesler spent ten years researching, developing and perfecting the silk screen process. He worked closely with Rabbi Abadi, and consulted with other senior *poskim* and *sofrim* to ensure that the process was in strict compliance with all halachic requirements.

Rabbi Yosef Tesler studied at Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, NJ and received *semichah* from the *Rosh Yeshiva*, Rabbi Shneur Kotler. He then joined Rabbi Yitzchak Abadi’s halachah *kollel* where he received *shimush* in the practical application of *psak balachah*.

Silk screen *Sifrei Torah* offer an opportunity for people to purchase beautiful kosher *Sifrei Torah* written by a God-fearing *sofer*, for a fraction of the price of a handwritten *Sefer Torah*. With high cost as the main obstacle to buying a *Sefer Torah*, silk screen *Sifrei Torah* offer an affordable solution and do not compromise on either quality or beauty. With silk screen, many more people would be able to fulfill the mitzvah of writing their own *Sefer Torah*, and many *shuls* would be saved from the sin of blessing and reading from invalid *Sifrei Torah*.

3. The Halachah

There are many laws that pertain to the writing of a *Sefer Torah*, some of which are quite complex. We will summarize some of the basic laws and then see if screen printing a *Sefer Torah* meets the necessary requirements. Since we are looking to replace the traditional handwritten *ksivah* (writing) with a new method of *ksivah*, we will be focusing primarily on the halachos of *ksivah*, not on what kind of *klaf* must be used, how the *sirtut* is done, what kind of ink to use, how the letters should be shaped, how to position the letters on the *klaf*, and what to do if a mistake is made, since there are no differences to these areas in the silk screen process.

- A *Sefer Torah* must be written with the right hand [of right-handed *soferim*] (*Shulchan Aruch*, Y”D 271:7).
- Some say that the *Sefer Torah* should be written with a reed quill and not with a feather quill (*Rama* 271:7).
- When the *sofer* begins to write he must say, “I am writing this sefer with the intention of sanctifying the *Sefer Torah*” (*Shulchan Aruch* 274:1).
- The *sofer* must copy every letter from another *sefer* and may not write by heart (*Shulchan Aruch* 274:2).
- The *sofer* must say every word out loud before he writes (*Shulchan Aruch* 274:2).
- Every time the name of Hashem is written, the *sofer* must say, “I am writing with the intention of sanctifying the name of Hashem” (*Shulchan Aruch* 276:2).
- If some ink falls on a letter to the point where the letter cannot be recognized, it does not help to scrape away the extra ink to restore the proper form of the letter. This is known as *chak tochos* (performing an action to something other than the letter itself in order to achieve the proper form of the letter). For example, scraping away the edge of a *dalet* to turn it into a *reish* (*Shulchan Aruch* O”CH 32:17).

- Tefillin and mezuzos must be written in order and if one letter was left out, the *sofer* may not go back and correct it (*Shulchan Aruch* O”CH 32:23, Y”D 288:3).

Now that we have enumerated some of the basic laws of writing a *Sefer Torah*, we can begin to analyze the silk screen *Sefer Torah* process and see if it is in compliance with halachah. We will also cover other halachic concerns, in addition to those mentioned in the *Shulchan Aruch*, that have been brought up by various halachic authorities over the years.

It is important, however, to first mention the “printing press *Sefer Torah*” that was discussed by the rabbis over 400 years ago. The question arose whether or not a printed *Sefer Torah* is kosher. This process, of course, is referring not to today’s automatic printers, but to the manual printing press where the letters were pressed onto the *klaf* by hand. Metal letters were placed upside down in the necessary order to write a page in the *Sefer Torah*. The letters were then covered with ink and the *klaf* was pressed down onto the letters. Many rabbis permitted it, while many others prohibited it.² The main point of discussion was whether the printing press was considered *ksivah* or not. This is of particular interest to us because we are also dealing with whether or not the silk screen process is considered *ksivah*. By reviewing the responsa written by the earlier rabbis, and studying the questions and concerns they had, and the conclusions they drew, we can shed some light on the silk screen project and hopefully learn from them and apply it to our case. We will soon go into further detail.

Below is a summary of the various questions raised regarding the validity of silk screen *Sifrei Torah*, and the answers given by those who determined that it is indeed kosher and acceptable for use.

² Some of the rabbis permitting the printing press *Sefer Torah* include: *Aruch HaShulchan* (Y”D 271:39, E”H 125:37), *Beis Shmuel* (E”H 125:3), *Eirech Hashulchan* (O”CH 691:1), *Knesses Yechezkel* (37), *Magen Avraham* (O”CH 32:57, 284:1), *Maharam Ben Chaviv* (*Get Pashut* E”H 125:15), *Maharshal* (*Yam Shel Shlomo Gittin* chapter 2 23), *Mas’as Binyamin* (99), *Rama Mipano* (93), *Taz* (Y”D 271:8), *Ya’avetz* (*Mor Uktziab* 32, page 24, *Migdal Oz Kuntress Even Bochen Pinah* 2:30). Some of those prohibiting it are: *Bach* (O”CH 691:4), *Birkey Yosef* (O”CH 691), *Bnei Yonah* (Y”D 271), *Chavos Ya’ir* (184), *Maharashdam* (Y”D 184), *Maharsham* (Vol. 3 357), *Rav Moshe Provinsalo* (Vol. 1 73), *Rokeach* (280), *Teshuvah Me’ahavah* (Vol. 1 9, Vol. 2 391), *Zerub Emes* (Y”D Vol. 2 117).

Must a *Sefer Torah* be Written with a Quill?

As mentioned earlier, some halachic authorities maintain that a reed quill must be used. In the silk screen process, a reed quill is not used. Does this affect the validity of the *ksivab*, and is a reed quill the ideal tool to use?

The *Be'er Hagolah* (Y"D end of 271) explains that the reason to use a reed quill over another type of quill is to avoid the problem of *chak tochos*. (With a feather quill one may encounter the problem of *chak tochos* if he has to erase ink because the letters didn't come out nice.) This doesn't apply to screen printing, where the quality of the letters is not compromised by using a squeegee as a *kulmus* (quill). The *Gra* (Y"D 271:23) explains, based on the gemara (*Taanis* 20b), that the reed merited being used as a quill to write *Sifrei Torah*, tefillin and mezuzos because it is soft and one should always be soft... According to both reasons, the use of another kind of *kulmus* does not affect the validity of the *ksivab*. The commentaries including *Shach* (Y"D 271:13) and *Taz* (Y"D 271:8) maintain that the custom is not to follow this *Rama*, and most *soferim* today don't use reed quills. The *Aruch HaShulchan* does not even mention this halachah.

Must Every Letter be Written Individually?

Traditionally, every letter is written individually. Is there a problem writing more than one letter at a time? If not, must the name of Hashem be written one letter at a time?

The gemara (*Yoma* 38b) tells about *Ben Kamtzar* who didn't want to teach others his method of writing. He would hold four quills between his fingers and write four letters at once. *Rashi* on the mishnah (*Yoma* 38a) explains that *Ben Kamtzar* would write the four-letter name of Hashem at once. The rabbis wanted to learn from him how to write this way and he wouldn't teach them. Regarding him it was said, "The names of the wicked shall rot" (*Mishlei* 10:7). We see that more than one letter may be written at once, including the name of Hashem. The *Mas'as Binyamin* (91) says that writing more than one letter at once is preferable and that there is much greater holiness that way.

Must Every Name of Hashem be Sanctified Individually?

Every time the *sofer* writes the name of Hashem he must be *mekadesh* that name. In the case of the silk screen *Sefer Torah*, he writes an entire page in one moment, and writes Hashem's name multiple times with one *kiddush*. Is there a requirement to be *mekadesh* every name individually?

The *sofer* is required to be *mekadesh* the name of Hashem just before he writes it. If he writes all of the names separately, he must be *mekadesh* the name every time he writes one. With silk screen, all the names are written right after he is *mekadesh* them (*toch kedey dibbur*), and the *sofer* knows he is writing many names so he has them all in mind. There is no interruption between his *kiddush* and his *ksivah*. (See *Binas Sofer* 1:1.)

Can the Name of Hashem be Written Together With Other Words?

Assuming that it is acceptable to be *mekadesh* many names at once, may the *sofer* be *mekadesh* the names and then write holy and non-holy names together?

The *Rama* (Y"D 276:2) says that if one sanctifies one of the non-holy names the *Sefer Torah* is kosher. If the *Sefer Torah* is kosher when the *sofer* explicitly sanctifies a non-holy name, surely it is kosher when he has in mind to sanctify only the holy names. The *Binas Sofer* says this clearly (1:1).

Can the *Sefer Torah* be Written Out of Order?

A *Sefer Torah* does not need to be written in order, and if a *sofer* makes a mistake he can go back and correct it at any time (Y"D 279:1). The *Ginas Vradim* (O"CH 2:12), however, says that the name of Hashem must be written in order. Is there any problem with the silk screen Torah being written out of order?

Many halachic authorities disagree with the *Ginas Vradim* (see *Yabia Omer* Vol. 3 Y"D 14:7) and maintain that the names of Hashem need not be written in order. In any event, silk screen *Sifrei Torah* are written from right to left, so all the names of Hashem are indeed written in order.

Is Screen Printing Considered *Ksivah*?

The Torah requires *Sifrei Torah* to be 'written.' Is this process considered *ksivah*, or is it some other method of writing that is not considered *ksivah*?

The gemara (*Gittin* 20a) questions whether a mold that is placed on top of a coin and banged to create a form on the coin is considered *chak tochos* or not. *Rashi* explains the question as follows: Does the mold simply bang in the edges surrounding the form, or does the mold push down the sides of the metal, causing the metal in the center of the coin to be pushed up into the mold? If the latter is true, says *Rashi*, this is *ksivah beyadayim*, writing by hand, which is a good *ksivah*. We see from this *Rashi* that even when working on the *tochos*—the area surrounding the letters—it is a good *ksivah* as long as something has been done to the letter itself. Certainly in our case where an action is being performed to the *yereichos*, the body of

the letter (by pushing the ink through the holes in the form of a letter), it would be considered a good *ksivah*.

Ksivah Ke'derech Ha'kosvim: Is This Considered a 'Normal' Way of Writing?

Rabbeinu Krashkash (see *Ritvah Gittin 9b*) explains that if one tears a paper in the shape of a letter and pours ink on top, according to *Tosafos (Gittin 9b)* it is not good because *ksivah* entails writing the normal way, and pouring ink on paper is not the normal way of writing. We see from here that the writing must be done '*derech ksivah*.' How is silk screen considered *derech ksivah*?

Rabbeinu Krashkash is referring to when nothing is done to the body of the letter. Rather, the ink is poured on the entire page and spreads to the torn areas, causing the letters to be written by filling the cracks. This is not *derech ksivah*. *Rabbeinu Krashkash* continues and explains that if the ink is poured directly into the cracks, this is considered *ksivah*. It is with that type of writing that silk screen has more in common, its process more like pouring ink directly into the cracks than on the entire page. This is because the only way to get the ink onto the *klaf* is by pushing the ink through the holes. If the ink was simply poured on top of the screen, it would never go through to the *klaf* below.

Others wanted to say that to be *derech ksivah*, an action must be performed in the forming of every letter. In our case an action is performed to form every letter. This is the action of forcing the ink through the holes onto the *klaf*. This action does not require shaping the letters with a quill.

We can prove that writing many letters at once is *derech ksivah* even without a quill. The proof comes from the *tzitzit*. Worn by the *kohen gadol*, the *tzitzit* was a golden plate with the words *Kodesh LaShem* on it as required by the Torah (*Shemos 39:30*). All halachos of *ksivah* apply to writing the *tzitzit*, so whatever is kosher for the *tzitzit* is kosher for a *Sefer Torah* as well. The *Rambam (Kley Hamikdash 9 2)* learns, as explained by the *Mahari Kurkus*, that the process of making the *tzitzit* involved placing wax on the front and writing *Kodesh Lashem* in ink on the back. The letters were then banged out with a tool to form the words *Kodesh LaShem* on the front, and the wax helped absorb the shock so the gold wouldn't crack. The *Ra'avad* gives another explanation. He says they used a form with the words *Kodesh LaShem* in relief and pressed it into the back of the *tzitzit*, embossing the words on its front. According to both the *Rambam* and the *Ra'avad*, the letters weren't formed with a quill. Additionally, according to the *Ra'avad*, the whole *tzitzit* was written at once. We can learn from here that writing in such a fashion is indeed called *derech ksivah*.

The *Rashba* (*Shu"t HaRashba Hamyuchasos L'HaRamban* 122) also mentions the concept of *derech k'sivah*. He says that *chak tochos* and *hatafah* (dripping ink to form a letter) are invalid because they are not done *derech k'sivah*. We will soon explain that silk screening does not incorporate any kind of *chakikah* or *hatafah*, so there wouldn't be a problem according to the *Rashba*.

Another point has been raised from the *Chasam Sofer* (Vol. 6 *Likutim* 29), who seems to indicate that writing many letters at once is not *derech k'sivah*. So too in our case, writing an entire page at once is not *derech k'sivah*. But a careful read of the *Chasam Sofer* will show he means the opposite. His reference to writing many letters at once is about the thirteen *Sifrei Torah* that *Moshe Rabbeinu* wrote on the last day of his life. That day was Shabbos. How was it permitted to write on Shabbos? The *Chasam Sofer* explains that *Moshe Rabbeinu* used the name of Hashem to make the *kulmus* write the *Sifrei Torah* (by means of a *shvuah*). This, he says, is not *derech k'sivah* and is therefore permitted on Shabbos. The reason that type of writing was not *derech k'sivah*, the *Chasam Sofer* is saying, is that it wasn't done by hand. The *kulmus* wrote the *Sifrei Torah* by itself. With silk screen, however, all the writing is done by hand, as we have explained, though many letters are written at once. The *Chasam Sofer* does not say that writing many letters at once is not *derech k'sivah*. Furthermore, he is speaking about the *Sifrei Torah* of *Moshe Rabbeinu*. Could anyone imagine that *Moshe Rabbeinu's Sifrei Torah* were not kosher? If anything we have proof from here that writing many letters at once is kosher!

The *Rama Mipano* (38) says that if a *sofer* writes with the quill in his mouth, it is invalid because this is not *derech k'sivah* (just as when someone right-handed writes with his left hand it is not considered *derech k'sivah*). On the other hand, we know that the writing on the *tzitzit* was considered *derech k'sivah*, even though the manner of writing was different from classic writing. The difference between the case of the *Rama Mipano* and the *tzitzit* is this. It is not normal to write with a quill in the mouth, but the *tzitzit* was made incorporating the normal way of embossing. Since this is an accepted method of writing, it is considered *derech k'sivah*. Silk screening is also a normal process, a method of writing used today around the world by millions. It is in no way similar to using a strange method of writing such as with the mouth.

***Lo Chakak*—Letters May Not be Etched**

The gemara in *Gittin* (20a) says that the letters must be written and not etched, and explains that the problem of *chakikah* (etching) is because of

chak tochos (etching out the insides of the letters). The commentaries explain that the prohibition of *chak tochos* is violated by performing an action to the area around the letter, thus creating a letter without having done anything to the letter itself. This is not *ksivah*. So too in our case, no action is being performed to form the letter. Rather, the ink is pushed across the screen and the letters are formed on their own. This should be included in the prohibition of *lo chakak*.

It is true that the *sofer* pushes the ink across the screen and that all of the holes are filled in the process. But at this point the *ksivah* has not yet begun. There is no way for the ink to get onto the *klaf* until the *sofer* pushes down on the screen with the squeegee. He must push the ink through the holes in the screen. The letters are written by the *sofer* pushing the *guf ha'os* (the letter itself) directly onto the *klaf*. In order for there to be a problem of *chak tochos*, an action would have to be done to something other than the *guf ha'os*.

This was the main question raised in regard to the printing press *Sefer Torah*. Some rabbis understood that the *klaf* was first engraved in the shape of the letters and then written with ink, posing a problem of *chakikah*. Others maintained that since the *klaf* was pressed down onto the ink instead of the ink being pressed onto the *klaf*, this was like performing an action to something other than the letter, leading to a problem of *chak tochos*. Yet the majority of the rabbis maintained that it was a good *ksivah*. They claimed that the engraving wasn't needed to write the *Sefer Torah* and was done only by those who were inexperienced and were concerned that without first engraving the *klaf*, some letters wouldn't come out nice. In regard to the claim that pressing the *klaf* is *chak tochos*, they argued that there is no difference between pressing the *klaf* onto the ink or pressing the ink onto the *klaf*. Either way, an action is performed to the letter itself.

In any event, this was with the printing press *Sefer Torah*. But even those who considered that *Sefer Torah* invalid would agree that silk screen *Sifrei Torah* pose no question of *chakikah*. That's because the only thing being done to write the letters is the *sofer* pushing ink onto the *klaf*. There isn't any engraving of the *klaf*. Nor is the *klaf* being moved.

Lo Hamatif—Ink My Not be Dripped

The *Yerushalmi* in *Gittin* (chapter 2, halachah 3) says that the letters may not be dripped. There is a dispute in the gemara as to whether that prohibition refers to dripping dots to form the letter and not connecting them, or even if the dots were later connected. The *Ramban* explains the latter opinion as follows: Even if the dots are connected afterwards, it is invalid

because this is not *ksivah*. We see from here that making dots in the shape of a letter is not considered *ksivah*, even if they end up connected to form a full letter. The silk screen is composed of many tiny holes. When the letter is formed it consists of many tiny dots of ink, just like in the *Yerushalmi's* case of dripping ink. The full letter isn't formed until after it is pushed onto the *klaf*.

Although the silk screen does consist of millions of holes, and the ink fills those holes, silk screen is in no way comparable to the *Yerushalmi's* case of dripping ink. In that case the entire letter was not complete at the time it was written, as explained by the *Pnei Moshe* (ibid.). With silk screen, by contrast, the moment the *sofer* pushes the letter onto the *klaf*, the letter is written in its entirety. There are no blank spots in the letter, and the ink does not spread once it is on the *klaf*.

Lo Hashofech—Ink May Not be Poured

The aforementioned *Yerushalmi* states another scenario that would render a *Sefer Torah* invalid: The gemara describes a case where one sends his friend a secret letter written with invisible liquid. The paper appears blank, but a special liquid poured on the paper renders the writing visible. (Something like invisible ink.) This method of writing is invalid because the *Torah* requires a *Sefer Torah* to be written and not poured. With silk screen, the letters are first formed and then pushed onto the *klaf* below. This is comparable to the *Yerushalmi's* case of writing a letter and then pouring ink on the page in order for the writing to appear. When the ink is pushed down onto the page, the letters have already been written.

The *Yerushalmi* prohibits pouring ink as a method of writing because when the ink is poured nothing is being written. The letters were already written before the ink was poured. This is certainly not considered *ksivah*. But with silk screen, the letters are being written on the *klaf* for the first time as the *sofer* pushes the ink down onto the *klaf*. There was nothing there before. Even if one wishes to explain the *Yerushalmi* to mean that pouring ink is forbidden even if the pouring actually writes the letters, it still would have nothing in common with writing silk screen *Sifrei Torah*. One may argue that pouring ink onto a stencil and lifting the stencil to reveal the letters is a problem because the letters weren't written. They merely ended up in the right form because the stencil had holes and the ink filled those holes. But with silk screen, the ink that is spread on the screen is not part of the *ma'aseh ksivah*. The *ma'aseh ksiva* begins when the ink is pushed through the holes and directly onto the *klaf* in the form of a letter.

Does the *Sofer* Have to Copy From a *Sefer*?

The *sofer* is required to copy what he's writing from a written text (*sefer*). How does he fulfill this requirement when writing a silk screen *Sefer Torah*?

A number of reasons are given for the requirement to copy from a *sefer*. The gemara in *Megillah* 18b says that tefillin and mezuzos can be written by heart because people are fluent in them. The *Rashba* explains that that is because everyone is fluent in them. When writing a *Sefer Torah*, by contrast, many people don't know it well, so it is forbidden even for someone who does know it well (a *gezeira* for someone who knows it well since there are others who don't). The *Me'iri* says it's forbidden to write a *Sefer Torah* by heart even for someone who knows it well because he may make a mistake. (The *Me'iri* learns that even a *sofer* fluent in the entire Torah may make a mistake.) Both the *Rashba* and *Me'iri* understand the purpose of copying from a *sefer* is to avoid mistakes. The *Ohr Zarua* (Vol. 1 *Hilchos Tefillin, Siman* 545) gives another reason. He maintains that the reason one may not write a *Sefer Torah* by heart is the prohibition of reading Torah *shebiksav* (the Written Torah) by heart (*temurah* 14b). He applies this reasoning to writing as well. Since not everyone is familiar with the entire Torah, it may not be written by heart. But well-known parts of the Torah, he explains, may be recited by heart. Accordingly, tefillin, mezuzos and other parts of the Torah that are well known by all can be said and written by heart. The *Yerushalmi* (*Megillah* chapter 4, halachah 1) also says it is forbidden to write without copying it from a *sefer*. No reason is given. This implies that it is forbidden even if there is no risk of making a mistake. According to the *Yerushalmi*, there's a written command that S'Ta" M (*Sefer Torah*, Tefillin and Mezuzah) may not be written by heart. The *Yerushalmi* is thus saying there is no reason to differentiate between writing a *Sefer Torah* and writing tefillin and mezuzos. *Talmud Bavli*, which makes a distinction between *Sifrei Torah* and tefillin and mezuzos, disagrees with the *Yerushalmi's* reasoning.

According to the *Rashba* and *Me'iri*, the problem of writing without copying from text is the possibility of making a mistake. According to the *Ohr Zarua*, the problem is writing something that is not well known to all. With silk screen, there is no chance of making a mistake and writing the wrong word. The reasons of the *Rashba* and *Me'iri* apply only where making a mistake is possible. Since with silk screen there is no room for human error when writing the words, there's no concern of writing by heart, and it would be permissible according to the *Bavli*. According to the *Ohr Zarua*, anyone who writes this way would be considered fluent, since being unfamiliar with the Torah wouldn't lead to any mistakes. The *Ohr Zarua* himself says that the problem of saying parts of the Torah by heart

is that he may make a mistake. Eliminating that possibility, then, eliminates the prohibition of reading Torah *shebik'sav* by heart. The *Yerushalmi* is not of concern either, since the Bavli rules otherwise. There are also other opinions in the *Yerushalmi* that disagree with this reason, so this may not be the conclusion of the *Yerushalmi*.

Must the *Sofer* Read the Words He is Writing?

The *sofer* must read from a *sefer* the words that he is about to write. How can he do this when writing a silk screen *Sefer Torah*?

Rashi (*Menachos* 30a), *Tosafos* (*ibid.*) and others³ explain that the reason the *sofer* needs to say the words out loud is to avoid making a mistake while writing. The *Magen Avraham* (O"CH 32:42) points out that when writing tefillin and mezuzos, if the *sofer* is copying from a *sefer* he does not need to say the words out loud. But when writing a *Sefer Torah* or *megillah*, he must say the words out loud even though he is copying from a *sefer*. He explains that the reason for the leniency by tefillin and mezuzah is that people are fluent in them and we are not as worried about mistakes. According to this reasoning, there is no need to say the words before writing a silk screen *Sefer Torah*. Since we are not worried that the *sofer* writing with silk screen will make a mistake, it is comparable to writing tefillin and mezuzos, which is permitted. The *Bach* (O"CH 32:16), however, gives another reason for this halachah. He says that before the *sofer* writes the words he must say them out loud to transfer the *kedushah* coming out of his mouth onto the letters as he writes them on the *klaf*. According to this, the requirement of saying the words out loud has nothing to do with making mistakes. The overwhelming majority of halachic authorities, including the *Shulchan Aruch* (O"CH 32:31), *Magen Avraham*, *Gra* (O"CH 32:(29)[31]) and *Gra* (O"CH 32:43), do not rule like the *Bach*. There is a strong question on the *Bach* from the gemara in *Menachos* 30a, which says that *Moshe Rabbeinu* didn't say the last eight verses out loud before he wrote them because it pained him. In *Sefer Yirmiyah* (36), *Baruch* wrote the *Kinnos* without saying them either. If the reason to say out loud is to avoid making a mistake, an exception can be made *beshaas hadchak*. But if the words need to be said in order to be *mekadesh* them, how can exceptions be made in a time of pain? We can conclude that *halachah lema'aseh* is not like the *Bach*.

³ *Sma*'g *essin* 22, *Mordechai*, *halachos ketanos*, *perek hakometz*, *siman* 957.

How Does This Compare to the Printing Press Version?

The earlier halachic authorities discussed writing a *Sefer Torah* using a printing press. How does the silk screen process compare? Are there any issues that the rabbis who were lenient regarding the printing press would find with the silk screen Torah? Are there any improvements that the rabbis who were stringent regarding the printing press would find acceptable with the silk screen Torah?

As mentioned previously, the main issue brought up in regard to the printing press *Sefer Torah* was *chak tochos*. We have already explained that silk screen has nothing to do with *chak tochos* since the ink is pushed directly onto the *klaf*. A number of other issues were raised, some that pertain to us and some that do not. Here are some of the issues that do not pertain to us. The *Maharashdam* was concerned that the *ksav* didn't come out nice, regular paper was used, it wasn't written *lishmah*, and it was done with *chakikah*. Silk screen comes out beautiful, kosher *klaf* is used, everything is written *lishmah*, and there is no *chakikah*. *Rav Moshe Provinsalo* was concerned that even if printing *Sifrei Torah* was done without *chakikah*, since it is similar to *chakikah*, one should not print *Sifrei Torah* so as not to come to doing *chakikah*. Silk screen doesn't come close to *chakikah* and would not be confused with *chakikah*. The *Teshuvah Me'ahavah* was concerned with the upside-down letters and the common occurrence of having to discard invalid pages due to the many errors that were made in the process. Again, neither of these have any application to our process. The *Chavos Ya'ir* said that the printed *Sifrei Torah* were invalid because they were written by non-Jews. This would imply that those written by Jews would be okay.

One can safely assume that the many rabbis who considered printing to be a good *ksivah* would certainly consider silk screen a good *ksivah*. There are no known additional issues with silk screen that have not already been addressed by the halachic authorities who discussed the printing press *Sifrei Torah*. Additionally, it is fair to assume that those who considered printing press *Sifrei Torah* invalid, for reasons that do not apply to us, would also approve silk screen *Sifrei Torah*.

Now let's take a look at the issues brought up by the rabbis that do pertain to us. The *Zerav Emes* was concerned that perhaps *chakikah* is not considered *derech ksivah*. We have already addressed this concern (*chakikah* may not be *derech ksivah* but silk screen is). The *Bnei Yonah* raises several issues not mentioned by any of the other rabbis. One issue is that all the letters are written at once and are not formed individually. The *Mas'as Binyamin* argues with him. Many others agree with the *Mas'as Binyamin*, and tens of rabbis who discussed this topic never mentioned this point of the

Bnei Yonah. We have also brought up some strong questions on the *Bnei Yonah*'s stance. Another issue mentioned by the *Bnei Yonah* is the concern that since there is no need for *sirtut*, it will be forgotten. To answer this, we can point out that *sirtut* is indeed used in the process, and why would anybody assume that it will be forgotten? We will always have handwritten *STa"M* that need *sirtut*, and we will always know about *sirtut*. Besides, as long as silk screen *Sifrei Torah* are made by learned God-fearing *soferim* who know the halachah (as is the case), there's no need to come up with new *gezeiros* (rabbinical decrees). Another point made by the *Bnei Yonah* is the issue of writing by heart without first reading the words. We have discussed this at length. Again it is important that none of the other halachic authorities who discussed printing press *Sifrei Torah*, neither the lenient nor the stringent, were concerned with this problem.

Many of the other points discussed in this article were never even brought up by the earlier rabbis, such as the requirement to use a quill, writing from a sefer, *chadash assur min batorah* and causing a loss of livelihood to other *soferim*. We must conclude that those halachic authorities felt that these issues were of no concern, and posed no compromise to the kashrus of these *Sifrei Torah*.

Can This Process be Used to Write Tefillin and Mezuzos?

Our above analysis applies to a *Sefer Torah*. Can the silk screen process also be used to write tefillin and mezuzos?

The current silk screen process may not be used to write tefillin and mezuzos. This is because all of the lines are written simultaneously, and tefillin and mezuzos must be written in order. All other *kisvei hakodesh*, however, may be written with silk screen. Currently only *Sifrei Torah* and *Megillos Esther* are available.

4. Non-Halachic Arguments

What If This Will Take Away from the Livelihood of Other *Soferim*?

Even if everything checks out as far as the laws of writing a *Sefer Torah* are concerned, what if everyone starts buying silk screen *Sifrei Torah*? This innovation will put all the *soferim* out of business. How can we take away their livelihood?

First and foremost, as religious Jews we have faith in Hashem that He will provide us sustenance. On Rosh Hashanah it is decided how much

money a person will make,⁴ and Hashem has no shortage of delivery methods. Anyone who thinks otherwise lacks faith.⁵ Furthermore, it is unlikely that selling silk screen *Sifrei Torah* will take away from other *soferim*. People who have the means to purchase handwritten *Sifrei Torah* will continue to do so. Silk screen merely expands the market and offers an opportunity for those who previously didn't consider buying a *Sefer Torah*. As a side point, when they began printing *sefarim* instead of handwriting them, some were worried about taking away the livelihood of the scribes who copied *sefarim*. Today *Baruch Hashem* there is an unlimited number of printed *sefarim*, and every Jewish home and *shul* is filled with them. Imagine if someone had prevented *sefarim* from being printed.

What will stop other people from forging *Sifrei Torah*?

Screen printing is a popular and easy-to-use technology. What will stop other people from printing non-kosher *Sifrei Torah*?

Forging *Sifrei Torah* is nothing new. Anyone who buys a *Sefer Torah* must check out thoroughly from whom and from where to buy. Our case is no different. Anyone buying a silk screen *Sefer Torah* must be sure he is buying it from a God-fearing *sofer*. As an extra measure of security, all of the silk screen *Sifrei Torah* written to date have a security feature built in, and the authenticity can easily be verified.

Is it forbidden to create new methods that were not previously used?

There's a common saying that "*chadash assur min hatorah*," which basically means that new processes are forbidden. How can we go ahead and create something that has not been done in previous generations?

In reality there is no such rule, and many new ideas have been introduced to *Klal Yisrael* throughout our history. Even ideas that were originally rejected because they were new, and there were rabbis who felt that they would lead to bigger problems, were eventually accepted among *Klal Yisrael*. Especially with an idea that has been backed and supported by respected rabbis and performed by God-fearing Jews, we can expect it to be accepted. Perhaps the greatest example is the tumult that was caused with the invention of machine matzos. Many rabbis were adamantly against it while other were for it. Of course we respect the opinion of every rabbi and the point is not to prove who is right or wrong. The point we wish to make is that at the time, people were busy screaming, *chadash*

⁴ *Beitzab* 16a.

⁵ See *Chovos Halevanos Sha'ar Habitachon* chapter 4.

assur min hatorah! Look how it turned out. Today a large percentage of *Klal Yisrael* eat machine matzos, and for the most part, those who do not, don't say it is *chametz*. What happened to *chadash assur min hatorah*? In the *STa"m* industry too there have been many changes. Machinery has been introduced to the *klaf* and tefillin-making processes. Plastic quills, new inks and computer checks have been introduced. All of them began with some resistance by people shouting, "*chadash assur min hatorah.*" In the end, however, they were all accepted.

This concludes our basic explanation of the halachic and other aspects of silk screen *Sifrei Torah*. A more comprehensive and detailed responsum can be found on this matter in Rabbi Yitzchak Abadi's *She'elos U'tshuvos Ohr Yitzchak* (volume 1, Y"D 53).⁶

5. What Went On Behind The Scenes?

In the 1970s, things were out of control in the world of *STa"m*. The market was flooded with unfit *soferim* and invalid *STa"m*. Something had to be done. In 1975 the *Vaad Mishmeres STa"m*, a group consisting of Torah scholars and God-fearing Jews, was formed to solve these problems. The *Vaad* claimed that between 1976 and 1980 only ten percent of mezuzos were found to be kosher.⁷ The *Vaad* set to work removing unfit and fraudulent *soferim* from the market, and checking and removing invalid *STa"m* from the market. They also developed computer software that could check the validity and verify the authenticity of *STa"m*. They educated the public and tested and certified *soferim*. In short, they created a revolution in the *STa"m* industry and did a tremendous job reducing the circulation of invalid *STa"m*, and unfit *soferim*.

Vaad Mishmeres STa"m came to be recognized globally as the leading authority in *STa"m*. They established strong connections with many prominent figures in various Jewish communities and became a powerful and influential organization. It was recommended that any new *sofer* who wanted to get into the *STa"m* market should be tested and certified by the *Vaad*. It was also recommended that anyone who wanted to sell *STa"m* should have his goods verified as kosher by the *Vaad*. All of this helped create a new standard where anything less than 100% kosher was unacceptable. We have a lot for which to thank them.

Naturally, when news of a new method of *ksivah* started circulating, the *Vaad* was interested in learning more about it. For some, there was concern that if the new method became popular, many *soferim* would lose

⁶ See <<http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=1525&pgnum=359>>.

⁷ <<http://www.shemayisrael.co.il/orgs/stam/guide2.htm>>.

their business. During the course of a subsequent discussion an influential person in the community offered a deal to the group producing the silk screen *Sifrei Torah*. He claimed to be able to secure rabbinic consent and overcome all halachic concerns, but in turn he wished to be made a partner in the business venture. When these offers were declined, some people began posting signs belittling the producers of the silk screen *Sifrei Torah*. When that failed to halt the project, they went to various rabbis and misrepresented the technical aspect of silk screen in order to get the rabbis to publicly oppose the methodology. Esteemed halachic authorities gave their opinion on the matter without first seeing the process, and in some cases it is clear from their response that they didn't understand how the process worked. In all probability they trusted those who misrepresented the process because of their respected positions in the community.

Subsequently the *Vaad*, as well as others, actively attempted to persuade the public that the silk screen process is unfit for use. In some cases, those who argued against it on halachic grounds admitted in private that their real opposition was for non-halachic reasons (see above). A number of articles were published to discredit the process. A pamphlet entitled *Ha'emes Vehashalom Ehavu*⁸ countered many of those arguments and exposed many distortions.

Although the silk screen process is endorsed by Rabbi Abadi, one of the world's leading *poskim*, subsequent events demonstrate how political pressure can be more influential in determining halachah than the strength of the halachic arguments. Strong political influence is often required to obtain halachic consent on a particular issue. In the case of silk screen, unfortunately, there were no influential people pushing for its acceptance. Proponents of the silk screen method did attempt to speak with different rabbis and demonstrate the process, but in many cases they were denied entry by the rabbis' assistant.

There were a number of rabbis who permitted the use of silk screen but when asked if they would write a letter of approval, they refused. In one case, the grandson of a rabbi who approved the process said that they couldn't write something against another rabbi who had prohibited it. In another case, the son of a rabbi begged his father not to write a letter of approval, fearing the backlash would take a negative toll on his health. In yet another case, a rabbi was surprised to discover his name signed to a letter forbidding silk screen *Sifrei Torah*—a letter he had never before seen. Once the silk screen method became taboo, nobody wanted to speak out in its support.

⁸ < <http://www.scribd.com/doc/268208308/Ha-Emet-Vehashalom-Ehavu>>.

After the backlash, most people were reluctant to purchase silk screen *Sifrei Torah*. There were others, however, who had no reservations, especially those who followed the *pesak* of Rabbi Yitzchak Abadi.

Quite a few silk screen *Sifrei Torah* and *megillos* were produced and sold, but the project never took off as intended. The group producing the *Sifrei Torah* decided it would be best to let the dust settle before revisiting the topic. Today a few such *Sifrei Torah* and *megillos* are still available, but the project is on hold and silk screen *Sifrei Torah* are not actively being written at this time. Perhaps one day this will change.⁹ 

⁹ A video illustrating the silk screen *Sefer Torah* process is available at:
< <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvFED55xhv8>>.