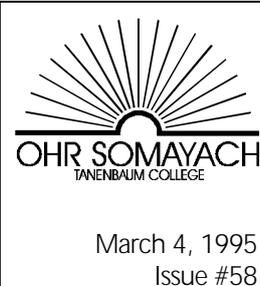




Ask The Rabbi...

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This edition contains:

1. I-doll-atry?
2. Answer to Last Week's Tricky Riddle
3. Earring Follow-up

Margalit Bracha Ingall @phantom.com wrote:

We were kidding around about the fact that the creator of the Barbie Doll is Jewish, so would that mean Barbie herself is Jewish? (that's not my question.) Then someone said dolls are forbidden according to Jewish law: That they are a representation of the human form, and therefore potentially worshipped as idols. The rest of us were fascinated by this (luckily, I think none of us is still playing with dolls) and wondered if you could confirm this and tell us the halachic reasons. Please answer soon because we're all anxious to know. Thank you!!

Dear Margalit Bracha,

The Torah says, "Don't make a carved statue or the image of anything in the heaven above or the earth below..." This verse prohibits making a 3-dimensional image. The *Shulchan Aruch* codifies this prohibition, and adds that even owning an idol is forbidden. One may neither own, use, nor derive any benefit from an idol whatsoever. One is not even allowed to throw it in the garbage; Rather, one must "throw it into the Dead Sea" or otherwise destroy it.

Now to your question about Barbie. Presumably, Barbie — even the "Barbie: Teen-Idol" version — is not made as an idol for anybody to worship. Would this make it permissible to own? The Talmud relates an incident that seems to be parallel: Rav Yehuda had a signet ring with a protruding human form. Shmuel said to him, "Sharp one [Rav Yehuda], poke out it's eye."

The Talmud records this incident to show that although Rav Yehuda's ring was not made as an idol, it was nevertheless forbidden for him to wear it, unless he disfigured the image somewhat. Otherwise, people might suspect him of maintaining it is an idol to be worshipped. Based on this, if you wanted to own a Barbie-doll you would have to poke out its eye, cut off its ear, or otherwise disfigure it. In many homes, this is the accepted practice.

Most people, however, follow the ruling of the *Chochmat Adam*. He says that nowadays, it is permitted to own an image of a human being. He explains as follows: The whole reason it was forbidden to own an image was so that nobody would suspect the owner of being a "closest" idol worshipper. But since people generally do not worship idols today, there is no longer any cause for suspicion.

According to this, it would be OK to own all types of dolls, etc., since it is quite obvious that they are for playing, not for praying. One may not actually make any image, or even commission one to be made; but once they are made one may purchase and keep them. Therefore, we need not ban Barbie, nor any full-feature doll, from Jewish homes.

Whenever I think of graven images, I'm reminded of Hy Shprung who came to the U.S. as a penniless immigrant and won the Lottery. The first thing he did was to commission a giant mansion... "and right in de front hall," he said to the architects, "I wanna Halo Statue!"

When the mansion was finally finished, the architects invited Hy to come and inspect their work. He eyed the marble floors and vaulting ceilings. Right in the center of the foyer was a stone sculpture of an angelic youth with a halo floating over its head, but he looked right past it.

"There it is! There it is!" he exclaimed, his eyes resting upon the telephone which sat upon a teak wood table. "There's the Halo Statue!"

The architects looked at each other in puzzlement.

Just then the phone rang. Hy ran over to the phone, picked it up, and said, "Halo! Statue?"

Sources

- Exodus 20:4.
- Tractate Rosh HaShana 24b.
- Tractate Avoda Zara 43.
- *Yoreh De'ah* 141:4 and 141:7.
- *Chochmat Adam* 85:6.

Answer to Last Week's Tricky Riddle

Q

What *mitzvah* applies only to someone who is sitting, reclining, or lying down?

A

Standing up in honor of a Torah Scholar or an elderly person (*Lifnei Seivah Takum V'hadarta P'nei Zakein*...You shall rise before an elderly person, and honor the presence of a sage. Leviticus 19:32)

Explanation: If a person is already standing when an elderly person enters the room he should remain standing, and not sit down in order to stand up. The *mitzvah* of eating *matzah* on the first night(s) of Pesach, applies even to one who is standing — i.e., the person should sit, recline and then eat the *matzah*.

Earring Follow-up:

Last week we wrote that it would be permitted for a man to wear an earring. Since some men wear them, they are not considered exclusively "women's" clothing. It should be noted, however, that this is only if the earring has no forbidden symbolism in the society in which the earring is worn. If the earring indicates that the wearer belongs to a group whose behavior is forbidden by the Torah, then it would be forbidden to wear.

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