

SHEIMOT

SHEIMOT: WHAT ARE SHEIMOT

Sheimot: Definition

Sheimot/sheimos are written items with:

- God's name in Hebrew or even in other languages;
- Three consecutive words of Torah in Hebrew (or commentaries on the Torah in any language); or
- Halacha in any language.

Sheimot: Illegible

If a normal person is not able to read your handwriting, then even if you wrote holy words, Torah, or halacha, they are not considered sheimot.

SHEIMOT: TREATMENT

SHEIMOT: HOW TO TREAT

Sheimot: Summary of Treatment

Sheimot must be treated carefully, protected from unclean places, and buried or—in some cases—double-wrapped rather than trashed. See individual listings below for details.

SHEIMOT: HOW TO DISPOSE OF

Sheimot: Disposal

These holy writings (tashmischei kedusha) may not be thrown directly into the trash, but should ideally be buried with like items (sheimot):

- Holy writings that contain God's name.
- Parts of Tanach (24-book Jewish Bible).
- Explanations of the Torah or commandments.

However, if a printed or written page (in contrast to parchment scrolls such as tefilin, Torahs, or mezuzas) contains God's name plus secular content, it must be double wrapped in plastic before being thrown in the trash.

REASON It would be a disgrace to bury Torah words with secular content.

NOTE You may find collection boxes (marked “sheimot/sheimos” or “geniza”) at a local Jewish school or synagogue into which you can deposit your sheimot items.

NOTE Tashmischei mitzva—items used to do a mitzva (such as talit or tzitzit)—must be wrapped in:

- One layer of plastic if they will be thrown away in dry trash, or
- Double layer of plastic if they will be thrown away into wet garbage.

Sheimot/Bury

Do not throw into trash, even if double wrapped:

- Handwritten scrolls of Torah, tefilin, mezuza.

- Printed Torah, Talmud, siddur, books of halacha, or Torah commentaries.

Rather, put them into a sheimot collection box or wrap in plastic and bury in a place where they will not be dug up. It does not need to be a cemetery.

Double Wrap and Throw into Trash

Double wrap and throw into trash:

- Newspapers and flyers that have Torah psukim or Torah commentaries and also have non-Torah content.

REASON Non-Torah material should not be buried as sheimot.

- Children's school handouts with psukim from the Torah or halachot that also contain non-Torah content (if they ONLY contain words of Torah, they should be buried as sheimot).

Single Wrap and Throw into Trash

For disposal of items used for mitzvot (tashmishei mitzva), you may wrap in one layer of plastic and throw it in normal garbage:

- Lulav,
- Etrog, or
- Talit/tzitzit (but NOT tefilin!)