

RABBI MOSHE ISSERLES—REMA

רבי משה איסרלש—רמ"א



Rabbi Moshe Isserles, Rema.

born: Cracow, Poland, c. 1520

died: Cracow, Poland, 1572

Popularly known as Rema (accent on last syllable), the initials of his name. Halachist, commentator.

Rema was a scion of a prominent and wealthy family. His father and grandfather were leaders of the Jewish community. The famous Rema Shul, a synagogue in Cracow, built by his father, survived the Holocaust. Even as a young boy he was known as an *illui* (prodigy), and before long his fame spread throughout Europe. As the rabbi of Cracow, he was very active in disseminating Torah knowledge, and he founded a prestigious yeshivah. Rema is one of the first Torah personalities to establish the spiritual predominance of Polish Jewry. It has been said that Rema is the Maimonides of Polish Jewry. He lived in the age of the codification of the Talmud, and he corresponded with **Rabbi Yosef Karo**, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*, the most influential work in that field. Rema was an admirer and, at the same time, a critic of the *Shulchan Aruch*, disapproving of the fact that its rulings are based primarily on decisions of Sephardi authorities, excluding Ashkenazi customs and traditions. He composed glosses on those paragraphs of the *Shulchan Aruch* in which he differs from the author, stating the Halachah as it has been decided by the Ashkenazi authorities, which is binding on Ashkenazi Jews. It should be noted that these halachic differences concern only peripheral matters of custom and tradition. On the fundamental issue of the belief in the supremacy of Torah law and unfaltering commitment to halachic authorities, the two communities stand as one, firmly and inseparably united. Rema named his glosses *Map-pah* ("Tablecloth"), as a "cover" for the *Shulchan Aruch* ("the Set Table"). These glosses have been incorporated into the text and are distinguishable in that they are printed in *Rashi* script,¹ as opposed to the bold-faced Hebrew type of the main text. The consolidation of the two works symbolizes the underlying unity of the Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities, whose chief spokesmen were the authors. It is through this unification that the *Shulchan Aruch* became the universally accepted Code of Law for the entire Jewish people.

The following selection typifies a halachic dispute between Taz and Shach on a point of Halachah in Shulchan Aruch—Yoreh De'ah. It is found in Chapter 89, paragraph 4, and focuses on a gloss by Rema.

If you wish to eat meat after eating cheese, you must remove from the table the rest of the bread you ate with the cheese. It is forbidden to eat cheese on a tablecloth on which you have eaten meat, and it surely is forbidden to cut cheese with a knife used for cutting meat, and even the bread that is eaten with the cheese must not be cut with a knife that has been used to cut meat.

(Yoreh De'ah 80:4)

Rema's gloss: Conversely [it is also forbidden to cut meat with a knife that has been used for cutting cheese]. However, if you stick the knife into hard, compact earth, you are permitted to use it³ [since the pressure against the compact earth removes any residue that may have been left on the knife].

Taz: The Rema's gloss requiring "sticking the knife into compact earth" refers to the case when you wish to cut cheese with a knife that has been used to cut meat, but cutting the bread with such a knife is permitted after merely wiping it thoroughly.

Shach: The Rema requires sticking the knife into solid earth even if you just want to cut the bread to be eaten with the cheese.