

# HALOCHOSCOPE

**This week's question:**

**How should a publication with verses/holy names published by missionaries be discarded?**

**The issues:**

- A) Religion and religious movements of gentiles**
- B) *Shaimos*, the sanctity of verses and names of Hashem**
- C) Written by a heretic**

## **A) *Gentile religions***

Assuming that they are gentiles, the missionaries' practices are probably forbidden to them as well. If they are Jewish, they are in violation of one of the three cardinal sins, for which one must die rather than violate. They are also *maisiss umaidiach*, leading others astray after idolatry. This sin is so severe that the violators are not given the usual due process of warning. They may be entrapped. Missionaries usually claim to believe in Judaism, plus their additional heretical beliefs. Thus, their main purpose is to convince people to believe these additional heresies.

Gentiles must follow the seven basic *mitzvos* of *Benei Noach*. These include *avoda zara*, the *mitzvah* forbidding worshiping idols. This also includes subscribing to a set of pagan beliefs and rituals. Innocuous rituals might not qualify as idolatry or paganism. Such rituals might be forbidden to Jews due to their superstitious nature. They might have pagan origins, also forbidden to Jews as they are covered by other *mitzvos* associated with *avoda zara*. For a gentile, unless it involves actual idol-worship, it might not be forbidden. Thus, a religion founded on the belief in Hashem as the One G-d would be permitted for gentiles. Religions are closely connected to cultures. Thus, a nation might adopt a monotheistic religion, but adapt it to their own culture. The religion might have within it some elements of paganism from the earlier idolatrous religions of their culture. These might involve idolatry for the gentiles, depending on the nature of the ritual.

When gentiles attach divine significance to anything other than Hashem, they raise the issue of idolatry. Jews are commanded to refrain from two types of idolatry. We are to believe in the One and Only Hashem, a positive *mitzvah*. And we are forbidden to have other gods or deities 'sharing' the title. This is known as *shituf*, partnership.

Some explain that this is the root of all idolatry. In principle, idolatry involves the human determining for himself who will be his god. Generally, a human feels helpless against forces beyond his control. Rather than surrender to his Creator, which would involve accepting His Torah, man is tempted to delude himself into thinking that he can control such forces. He first attributes the control of these different forces to a multitude of controllers. He claims that no single force is in absolute control over the entire universe. This allows him to 'play them off against each other'. In reality, there are indeed

forces beyond the control of mankind. These are the forces of nature put in place by Hashem at the time of Creation. They have no discretion of their own, but are all under the direct control of Hashem.

The mistaken view of how the forces work, independent of one another and with no controlling power, is the basis of a *shituf* based religion. Accordingly, there is a view that gentiles are forbidden to practice *shituf*. This includes any claim that there exists a force over which Hashem has no control. It also includes believing that any power can bestow good or bad, without going through Hashem. Some maintain that it includes other divine forces that would be attributed sanctity on a lower level than Hashem. It would also include a pagan religion adapted to incorporate Hashem, if it does not discard the old idols.

Christianity is idolatry for Jews, and according to this view, for gentiles as well. Belief in a trinity, with powers of mercy etc. attributed to other bodies to avoid and evade divine wrath, is pure *shituf*. Patron saints are sanitized ancient idols. Icons, including the cross, can be traced to old pagan religions. Local pagan elements are used to broaden appeal and to fit in with local culture. These might also be considered idols. A church considering its 'savior' more than a messiah by its nature contradicts belief in Hashem.

Others maintain that so long as the religion does not exclude belief in Hashem along with the idols, it is permissible for gentiles. *Shituf* is an additional *mitzvah* for Jews only. It is not at the root of all idolatry. Gentiles are commanded to believe in Hashem, but not to desist from belief in other gods as well. In addition, the Torah distinguishes between Jews and gentiles in how they are to view the stars and forces of nature. As mentioned, the forces of nature do exist and are beyond mankind's control. They are placed by Hashem in a way that they follow a preordained pattern. Gentiles are indeed under the influence of such patterns. Part of their pagan belief system is an understanding of such patterns. There might indeed be ways for them to adjust their behavior to gain a favorable pattern. Jews are not governed at all by these forces, but directly by Hashem. Therefore, a gentile may profess a belief of sorts in the forces, or ministers of Hashem. For a Jew, this is idolatry. Accordingly, depending on how the power is attributed to these forces, the gentile religion might not be considered *avoda zara* for its gentile adherents.

Some maintain that no poskim actually permit *shituf* for gentiles. The context in which the dispensation appears refers to a separate issue. It is forbidden to swear in the name of an idol. One may not cause another to invoke the name of his idol. Yet, many poskim permit causing a gentile to swear, though he will use the name of his idol. The reason given is that he will also use the Name of Hashem, and *shituf* is permitted to him. However, some interpret this to mean that they are permitted to swear by the name of an idol. This is not idol-worship, and is only forbidden to Jews additionally.

Many poskim do not consider gentiles practicing these religions nowadays to be idol-worshippers. They do not understand the idolatry involved. They are not devout, or are devoid of spirituality. They swear freely out of habit. Their practices are considered *minhag avosaihen*, traditions. Missionaries, however, are clearly devout.

All are in agreement that actual idols, having been worshiped, are forbidden items for Jews. The form of worship, alone, might be permitted to the gentiles. Some of these items are considered intrinsic *avoda zara*, even when they are not worshiped. This leads

to major debate on crosses worn as ornaments, and on the Islamic crescent. Some items are a *tashmish*, used in the service of *avoda zara*, and are also forbidden. This can extend to a building used to house *avoda zara*, depending on whether it was built for this purpose, how devout the worshipers are, how serious they are about housing the *avoda zara*, how important its presence is to them when they congregate, how important it is to congregate in this house, and on other considerations. [See Va'eschanan 4:15-20, e.g. Avoda Zara 2a perek 3, Poskim. Rambam AZ 9:4. Emunos Vedaiaos 1:3(5 10) 2:2 7. Tur Sh Ar OC 156 YD 147:3 CM 182 176:51, commentaries.]

### **B) Shaimos**

The seven Names that identify Hashem by his attributes are extremely holy. When the Torah commands us to destroy idols, it states: you shall not do so to Hashem! There is also a positive *mitzvah* to fear Hashem. An aspect of this awe is the prohibition on using His Name in vain or erasing it. This includes writing it unnecessarily. An item usually attains its holiness through a verbal proclamation. The writer declares, before beginning to write the *shem*, his intention to write this word *lishma*, with the holiness ascribed to it. Once written, the *shem* assumes a holiness of its own. It sanctifies other letters suffixed to it, and to a lesser degree, the entire scroll or paper it is written on.

There are preconditions for the validity of a *shem* written in a *sefer Torah*, *tefilin* or *mezuzah*. However, *mechikah*, erasing, is forbidden even when many preconditions are not met. A *shem* written in colored ink, on wood or other materials, or embossed on metal or glass may not be erased. Engraved and embroidered *shaimos* are the subject of discussion. Some rule them full-fledged *shaimos* even though they are not considered written. It is forbidden to erase a *shem* written in a Hebrew alphabet other than that used for a *sefer Torah*, such as 'Rashi' lettering. Erasing includes cutting through them or, in the case of metal, melting them. The poskim debate the severity of erasing a *shem* written without *lishma* intent. Some say, though it is invalid for a *sefer Torah*, it is Scripturally forbidden to erase. Others consider it Rabbinically forbidden. Some consider a printing press, when powered by a human *lishma*, as fully holy. An electrically powered press has more outside power. Some suggest that an ink-jet printer could even be considered valid for a *sefer Torah*, since it is not a press and real ink is thrown onto the page. Nonetheless, most printed material is not *lishma*, and *mechika* is less stringent on it.

Words that are not *shaimos*, but are holy, such as prefixes to a *shem* and other words in the *sefer Torah*, *mezuzah* or *chumash*, may not be erased, Rabbinically. This also applies to translations of *shaimos* and descriptions of Hashem's G-dly attributes. Books used to learn from may not be destroyed. Some maintain that four factors determine the level of holiness: the materials; the lettering; the intent; and the content.

*Gramma*, indirect erasing, is not considered *mechika* when unintentional. Thus, one with a *shem* written on his skin may immerse, though the water will erase the *shem*. Nonetheless, *gramma* should be avoided.

Sacred items are treated with reverence. The *mitzvos* that apply to this include: *Umikdashi tira'u*, show awe for the sanctuary; *Lo sechalelu*, do not desecrate Hashem and His Name; *Lo sa'asun kain*, do not profane items dedicated to Hashem as would be done to idols. Such items might be serve or service holiness, or be actual holy items.

Items twice removed from the source of the sanctity, but used in its connection, have some sanctity. We learn from the *mitzvah* to cover the blood of slaughtered undomesticated animals or fowl, that one may not behave disrespectfully towards a *mitzvah*. While an item is in use for the *mitzvah*, or anytime that it is still viable, it may not be used for mundane purposes, even if it will not interfere with its uses in the service of the *mitzvah*.

The Torah says that when Hashem is within our camps, our camps shall be holy, and He shall not see within us a nakedness. These are a *mitzvah* to keep unholiness from the presence of holiness, including writings, and a *mitzvah* forbidding bringing something holy into a place reserved for the unclean. If a holy item must be taken in there it must be kept covered. Disposal in the garbage could be *grama*, if it is incinerated. In a landfill, it is actually buried. The issue is disrespect, rather than destruction. Since it is together with the other refuse, it is being treated disrespectfully. [See Shabbos 115-116 120, Eruvin 98a, Megilah 26b Rosh Hashana 18b Gitin 45b 54b, Makos 22a, Shavuos 35a-36a, Menachos 30b 32b, Sofrim 3:11-13, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 154 YD 179:8 276 282 284:2, commentaries. Chinuch 437, MnCh. Chavos Yair 116. Chazon Ish YD 164:2-3. Igros Moshe YD II:134-136. Shvus Yaakov III:10. Tzedaka Umishpat 16:n78-83 91 93.]

### C) *Ksivas min*

The Talmud discusses a *shem* written by a gentile or a heretic. A gentile might indeed have had in mind Hashem Himself. Therefore, one should not use the book, but it should be buried respectfully. A heretic most probably had in mind his heretical beliefs. Therefore, the book should be burned. Thus, a book published by missionaries should theoretically be burned. Most garbage is placed in a landfill, rather than incinerated.

A printed book does not rise to the level of a *shem* written with intent, as mentioned. In addition, the purpose of burning, rather than burying, is twofold. Firstly, it fulfills the *mitzvah* to destroy an idol and the names of the idols. Secondly, if it is buried, it can still be unearthed at a later time and used. Burial in a landfill will probably lead to total decomposition. Thus, by throwing the book in the garbage, one can be sure that it will not be unearthed. Since it was only printed by whoever manned the presses, and was probably printed electronically as well, it has little intent. The *grama* would therefore be enough fulfillment of the *mitzvah* to destroy it. [See Gitin 46b, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 39:4 YD 281:1, commentaries. Tzedakah Umishpat 16:note 86.]

In conclusion, the book should be put in the regular garbage.

***On the parsha ... Elazar took the copper pans of those who were burned .. beat them into a coating of the mizbaiach. It was a reminder to Israel ... [17:4-5]*** Those who were burned were punished for arguing against Hashem! Apparently, they consecrated the pans with enough intent that sanctified them. They could not be destroyed, nor used for mundane purposes. Instead, they were beaten as is, and their outlines could be seen by Israel as the coating of the copper altar.

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**whose *yahrzeit* is the 4<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz..** 

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