


HALOCHOSCOPE



This week's question:

Someone is offered work with an electrical contractor. The first job will be in a church. May he take the job, and if so, under which conditions?

The issues:

- A) Religion for gentiles
- B) *Lifnai ivair*, misleading others to sin
- C) Building a *bais avoda zara*, structure housing an idol
- D) Entering an existing church
- E) Benefiting from such work

A) Religion for gentiles

Gentiles must follow the seven basic *mitzvos* of *Benei Noach*. These include *avoda zara*, the *mitzvah* forbidding worshiping idols or 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 or pagan origins. For a gentile, unless it involves actual idol-worship, it might not be forbidden. A nation might adopt a monotheistic religion, but adapt it to their own culture, with elements of ancient paganism. These might involve idolatry for the gentiles, depending on the nature of the ritual.

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'. There are indeed forces of nature beyond the control of mankind, 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 is the basis of a *shituf* religion. In one view, gentiles are forbidden to practice *shituf*. This includes: any claim that there exists a force over which Hashem has no control; believing that any power can bestow good or bad, without going through Hashem; some maintain that it includes attributing lower level sanctity or divinity to forces; and a pagan religion adapted to incorporate Hashem, if it does not discard the old idols. Accordingly, belief in a trinity, patron saints and attributing sanctity to old pagan icons, including crosses, all constitute paganism for gentiles as well. Attributing powers of 'savior' to a being other than Hashem also raises this issue.

Others maintain that so long as the religion does not exclude belief in Hashem, 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. Stars and the forces of nature are placed by Hashem to follow a preordained pattern. Gentiles are under the influence of such patterns. Part of their pagan belief system is an understanding of such patterns. There might indeed be ways adjust their behavior to gain a favorable pattern. Jews are not governed by these forces, but directly by Hashem. Thus, a gentile may profess a 'belief' in the forces, or ministers of Hashem. For a Jew, this is idolatry. Accordingly, depending on how power is attributed to these forces, the religion might not be considered *avoda zara* for its gentile adherents.

Some maintain that no poskim permit actual *shituf* for gentiles. The context in which the dispensation appears refers to a separate issue. 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. 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 do not consider gentiles practicing these religions nowadays 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 *minhag avosaihen*, traditions in memory of ancient gods. Consequently, leniencies apply to dealing with them.

All are in agreement that the 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*, see below. [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) Lifnei Ivair

The Torah forbids placing a stumbling block before the blind. This refers to misleading others to sin, helping them sin knowingly, and giving bad advice. It also forbids helping a *Ben Noach* violate one of his seven *mitzvos*, such as *avoda zara*. *Lifnei delifnei* is not forbidden. One may act as an accessory to one who in turn is an accessory for a sinner. Some say this refers to helping a gentile. The prohibition of *lifnei ivair* is not part of the actual transgression, but a *mitzvah* in its own right. Since it is not one of the seven *mitzvos* of *Benei Noach*, gentiles are not forbidden to do it.

Lifnei ivair is forbidden Scripturally only if the sinner could not sin without the help. If the sinner can reach the item he sins with, passing it to him does not violate the Scriptural *mitzvah*. Rabbinically, all aiding and abetting is forbidden. A church can find many other electricians. Furthermore, one is not to be an accessory to the worship. He is making it easier by aiding in the usage of the place where they congregate. [See Avoda Zara 2a 6b 14a 15b, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar YD 139:15 143:2 147:1-3 148 151:1-4, commentaries.]

C) Bais avoda zara

All icons used in the services are *avoda zara*. Therefore, the building housing them

is a *meshamesh*, servicing the *avoda zara*. *Bais avoda zara* might be a structure to be worshiped. One might make additions to an existing structure, or simply bring an *avoda zara* into the building. One might also build a niche for *avoda zara* in a structure built for other uses. If the actual building was purpose built to be worshiped, it is forbidden to benefit from it. An addition made to an existing building may be removed, and the building is permitted. If an existing building has crosses and crucifixes brought into it and then removed it is permitted. Building anything to be *meshamesh avoda zara* is forbidden. However, once one did this, he may keep and use the payment for his work. The Talmud discusses building a house for an idolater. One may work with the builders until they come to the niche used for the idol, and then the Jew must stop.

In our case, the electrical contractor hires the Jew to help him make improvements to the existing building. The electrical work does not necessarily affect the icons themselves, but might affect the space that they occupy. It does serve to facilitate the worship. While the Jewish employee will not be working on the actual space of the icons, he will be making a general improvement to the building. Some maintain that while the Talmud allows building walls that do not house the idol, the roof serves the entire building, and is forbidden. It is like the niche. There is even discussion about providing the floors and the windows. This raises some questions regarding the electrician, who is helping to provide lighting and heat to the entire structure. Churches nowadays are used as multi-purpose buildings. However, they always provide benefit to the church. Nonetheless, the practitioners of the religion might not be considered idolaters. The housing of the idol forbids certain benefits from the building, but does not mean that the entire building may not be benefited from, especially when the electrician can claim to be working to service the rest of the building together with the contractor. [See *Avoda Zara* 16a-b 19b 45a-47b etc., *Poskim*. *Tur Sh Ar YD* 143:1-2 145:3, commentaries.]

D) Issues with entering a church building

Al tifnu el ha'elilim is a Scriptural injunction against looking in the direction of an idol, including a cross. It also forbids bending down facing the cross, regardless of the reason. One could shut his eyes, look in another direction, or stand or sit with his back to the cross. Some say that one may not remain in the same room as the cross. If it is concealed from view, by a cover or behind a partition, a worker would have an easier time.

Lo sasuru acharei levavchem forbids doing things that lead to idolatrous thoughts, including being in the presence of a place where the idol is accorded reverence.

Harchaik me'aleha darkecha is a Rabbinical preventive measure, linked to Scripture. One may not walk on a path leading to *avoda zara*. He must walk parallel to it four *amos* distant, or at an angle away from it. In our case, the electrician could use entrances other than those leading to the sanctuary, if the building is used for other purposes. The separate entrance should be at least seven feet from the main entrance. If the electrician will need to enter the sanctuary itself, perhaps he may walk in backwards!

Maris ayin, appearances, are also forbidden. One may not do what onlookers think is a forbidden activity. First, one may not arouse suspicion. Second, one may not do something that unlearned onlookers could confuse with a prohibited activity. They might conclude that the prohibited activity must really be permissible. A Jew entering a church raises the issue of *maris ayin* of idolatry. If it is obvious that he is going inside to do his

work, *maris ayin* does not apply. There still exists the specter of a Jew violating the other issues raised. One may rely on the same dispensation from *maris ayin* of worship, to prevent the appearances of violating the other prohibitions. Onlookers will suspect and then rationalize that this case is special. [See Avoda Zara 11b-12b 17a, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar YD 142:10 14, 150, commentaries, 151: DarkTesh 25. Igros Moshe OC IV:40 YD III:77.]

E) Providing benefit to, and benefiting from, Avoda Zara

A Jew may not benefit from *avoda zara*, based on the Scriptural *mitzvah*, *lo yidbak* .. This includes benefiting from its trappings and adornments. *Mehaneh*, providing benefit to *avoda zara*, is also forbidden as a sub-category of *lo yidbak*. If deriving benefit is forbidden, one may certainly not bring it benefit. This forbids paying a fee towards the upkeep of *avoda zara* or its facilities, or towards its functionaries.

Assuming that there is an issue of *avoda zara* here, the electrician is technically helping maintain it. By receiving payment, he is also benefiting from it. He receives his payment indirectly, from the contractor, as part of his wages for all the work he does. Furthermore, there are other uses for the building. True, the humanitarian efforts of a church are usually made to promote its agenda. However, since the benefit is not necessarily going directly and specifically to the *avoda zara*, it is mitigated somewhat.

Even if there is no actual forbidden worship, there is some service being provided to the icons. This service is provided to the building in its entirety, with the icons benefiting at the same time. The poskim discuss providing a business service to the building of an *avoda zara*. Based on certain conditions, such as making the contract indirect and through a gentile, some permit it. In addition, if the icons are all removed, they even permit the Jew to enter and take measurements. The benefits seem to be permitted due to the combination of factors mentioned here. [See Avoda Zara 13a 47, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar YD 139:15 142:1 (Darkei Teshuva 2) 143:5 6 147:, commentaries. Igros Moshe YD III:34.]

In conclusion, there are ways to allow the electrician to do the work and accept the payment. All icons may be removed or concealed. There could be no work done on the structures holding the icons, including directing wiring through them and repairing the holes. However, it is extremely distasteful for an observant Jew to do this work.

On the Parsha ... *we will walk on the king's highway, we will not turn to the right or to the left .. Edom said: "Do not pass through [my land]" .. we will go up the mesilah path .. He said "Do not pass through .." [20:17-20]* What did the *Bnai Yisroel* hope to accomplish by changing the route from the king's highway to the *mesilah* path. *Ramban* says that the first path was the main public road and passed close to the towns. The second was a less used road that avoided the towns. It was used by those passing through to get to other places. When a town celebrates a pagan holiday, one may travel on the road leading to the town as long as he does not enter it. However, if there is an alternative route he may not go on the road towards the town. Onlookers could suspect him of going to celebrate. *Yisroel* thought that *Edom* suspected that if they travel the king's highway they would enter the towns. They offered to go the other route.

Sponsored by Robin Knee and Alan Goodkind in memory of her mother, Michla bas Meir a"h,

whose *yahrzeit* is on the 10th of Tamuz. ☞

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