


# HALOCHOSCOPE



**This week's question:**

**A devout gentile has a plumbing company called “J- does plumbing” - not his personal name. He asks customers to write the check to this name. May one write this check?**

**The issues:**

**A) Religion for a gentile**

**B) Doing business with an idolater; *Lo sazkiru, lo yishama al picha*, making reference to idols**

**C) *Shem reshaim yirkav*, obliterating the name of the sinners**

**A) Religion for a gentile; *modeh*** [based largely on Halochoscope XII:32]

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 this as the root of all idolatry. In principle, idolatry involves the human determining for himself who will be his god. A human feels helpless against forces beyond his control. Rather than surrender to his Creator, which involves 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.

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

Other poskim maintain that so long as a 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. Consequently, leniencies apply to dealing with them.

All are in agreement that idols that were 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. 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.

It is forbidden to show any sign of validating *avoda zara*. This includes certain Scriptural *mitzvos*, such as not swearing in the name of a god. It forbids bending down before an idol, even if one is doing so to pick up an item. If a name is used as a god, there is a Scriptural *mitzvah* to eradicate it, *veibadtem es shemam*. Our case is obviously problematic. [See Va'eschanan 4:15-20, Re'ay 12:3. e.g. Sanhedrin 60b 63b Avoda Zara 2a 12a-b 17a perek 3, Poskim. Rambam AZ 9:4. Emunos Vedaiaos 1:3(5 10) 2:2 7. Tur Sh Ar OC 156 YD 147:1 3 150 CM 182 176:51, commentaries. Minchas Chinuch 136.]

### ***B) Doing business with an idolater; Lo sazkiru; Lo yishama al picha***

We mentioned the issues with causing the name of the idol to be mentioned, especially in respectful, reverent terms. More so, in a religious setting, one causes the idolater to violate idolatry. *Shem elohim achairim lo sazkiru, lo yishama al picha*, the name of other gods you shall not utter, it shall not be heard by your mouth. This includes uttering it directly or causing it to be uttered by others. Even if gentiles may worship a particular deity, a Jew may not cause the name to be heard. The exception is names of idols that are mentioned in the Torah, such as *Peor*. Even so, the Talmud uses negative euphemisms.

Based on this, the poskim recommend avoiding business partnerships with gentiles. While the Jew might never ask his non-Jewish partner to swear, and certainly not by his gods, the partner will swear anyhow. This routine violation is problematic. However, if the gentile uses the names of his multiple gods, the aforementioned views are less concerned. In our case, it appears that the plumber mentions only the J- god. This is indeed *avoda zara*. The homeowner is not going into a partnership. However, the exact same issue arises. The plumber will definitely say openly: "Make the check payable to ..." Furthermore, the Jew will need to write this name after the plumber mentioned it in reverence. Writing the name is definitely an issue for a Jew, just as saying it is an issue.

Neither saying nor writing is pure *avoda zara*, punishable by death. Yet it is forbidden for a Jew. The poskim discuss whether a non-Jew is forbidden in this, since it is a separate prohibition. It is not punishable by death for a Jew. Therefore, some say it is not included in the seven *Noachide mitzvos* as a subsection of *avoda zara*. For the purposes of our discussion, this refers to *lifnei ivair*. This forbids placing a stumbling block before the blind. It refers to aiding and abetting a sinner. A Jew may not cause a gentile to sin. In our case, by engaging the plumber's services, the Jew causes the plumber to utter the name. If the gentile is forbidden to do this, the Jew may not help him do it. Furthermore, the Jew causes the plumber to cause the Jew to write the name. However, if the gentile is not forbidden to mention the name, nor forbidden to cause the Jew to mention it, the Jew is not in violation of *lifnei ivair*. Nonetheless, the Jew is obviously causing the name to be mentioned. He will also mention it in writing. The Jew can pay cash, and avoid discussing the name of the business at all. If the gentile chooses to talk about it, the Jew is not liable. [See refs to section A. Chinuch 86-87, commentaries.]

### ***C) Obliterating names of the wicked***

Even if the name is not being used as a god, the person referenced was a *rasha*, evildoer. In fact, traditionally, he was one of the worst ever. There are two issues with his

name. First, one may not admire a rasha. Every time his name is mentioned, it leads to admiration. Second, one may not use his name. The *passuk* in *Mishlei* says “The name of the evildoers shall rot.” The Talmud says that their names will not be used by later generations. This could be a punishment. However, most poskim assume that naming a child after them is forbidden. The Scriptural *mitzvah* to eradicate the memory of Amalek refers to physical eradication. Some explain the essence of the *mitzvah* as a way to ensure that their name will never be respected. It is a time honored custom of scribes to try out their quills by writing ~~Amalek~~ and striking through it. The *piyut* for *Parshas Zachor* mentions this idea of obliterating the name and memory of Amalek. Thus, there is indeed a precedent for erasing the name of the evil.

It seems that the purpose is to distance oneself from the evil, to prevent his name being used when a Jew gets an *aliya*, and to allow the memory to fall into decay. The Talmud implies that it brings bad *mazal* to the person named after the evildoer.

Some names can involve other violations. Certain Greek mythological gods are also used as names in some circles. There seems to be a consensus to forbid these names. Each time the name is called, the god is mentioned. One may not mention these names, nor cause others to mention them. The poskim debate whether this applies to a regular name that happens to have been used for a god. The Greek leader Alexander was not particularly righteous. Due to a historical incident, it was decided to name all *kohanim* born in one year Alexander, to avoid *aivah*. This was to appease Alexander, rather than a wish for the *kohanim* to follow in his ways. Accordingly, using the name just to appease is permitted. Some would apply this in cases of other *reshaim*. However, there is no case to be made to appease the bearer of the name in our question or his followers. The appeasement in the time that Alexander was adopted was more far-reaching. In our case, it would appease a plumber by respecting the name of his favorite rasha. Furthermore, Alexander was being appeased to promote something good that he would be doing. In our case, this rasha is not known for doing anything positive. Indeed, even the Talmud avoids using his given name. [Sometimes, this was self-censorship as well.]

Based on all of the aforementioned, one would not wish to use the name of a known rasha in any context. In our case, it is not being used to name a person, but it is indeed a reference to the *rasha*. Furthermore, it is a reference to this *rasha* in a reverent context. [See See Yuma 28b, Tosafos, cross-references, Sotah 34b, Piskei Tosfos 20, Sanhedrim 82b. Yotzros Leparshas Zachor. Chinuch 598 603 604. Tur Sh Ar OC 139:3 (BGRO) YD147 151:14 178:2 YD 265:1 (RAE) EH 129, commentaries.]

In conclusion, one may not write this name in a check, but should pay cash.

**On the Parsha ...** Hashem said to me ... they have made a molten image ... I saw that you sinned .. made a molten image of a calf ... [9:12, 16] When quoting Hashem, Moshe did not mention the calf, yet Moshe himself mentions the calf! Until the Torah was given, this would be considered the name of an idol. After being written into the Torah, it may be mentioned.

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