

HALOCHOSCOPE

The subject dealt with here will take up two issues.

May one attend a 'holiday' or 'new year's' party, hosted by his or place of employment? What if they offer to provide special kosher food for the Jew? What if the absence will be taken as a negative attitude to the employer or employee body? This might cause anti-semitism or monetary loss.

The issues:

In this issue:

- A) Jews' participation in non-Jews' parties
- B) Participation in 'holiday' festivities

In next issue:

- C) *Aiva*, consideration for antisemitism
- D) *Parnasah*, livelihood

A) Jews' participation in non-Jews parties

If a gentile invites a Jew to a festive affair, the Jew may not attend. This general prohibition is linked to a Scriptural passage, *'Beware, lest you draw up a covenant with the [gentile] inhabitants of the land ... and they will slaughter [livestock] to their gods, and he will invite you and you will eat of his slaughtering, and you will take of his daughters for your sons ...'* The context of the Talmudic passage recording this prohibition discusses religious celebrations. Gentiles are forbidden to worship idols. This is one of the seven laws for the children of Noah. A Jew may not aid and abet another in sinning. This is a Scriptural *mitzvah*, under the category of *Lifnei Ivair Lo Sitain Michshol*, do not place a stumbling block before the blind. The sinner is being led to 'stumble' by the one helping him. This also applies to helping gentiles sin. Causing a gentile to increase his idol-worship is thus forbidden. A number of activities that could lead to this are therefore forbidden. These including certain commercial activities, as well as some other interactions that could cause additional joy to a gentile around the times that he would anyhow be involved in his religious rites and celebrations.

It is in this passage that the Talmud discusses attending a feast at the invitation of the gentile. There are communal idolatrous celebrations, the participation in which, including many interactive activities, is universally forbidden to Jews. There are also personal celebrations, such as the day that the gentile was released from imprisonment or the day of his son's wedding. Participation and interaction in these is also forbidden. However, in the former, interaction with all gentiles must be curtailed on those days, and even, in Eretz Yisroel, on the days prior to them. In the latter, only interaction with the particu-

lar gentile is forbidden, and only on that day.

The Poskim debate whether there is a connection between the passages. The implication is that at the root of this prohibition is the problem of supporting the gentile in his celebration, which leads to his idolatry. He will likely thank his gods for his successes in garnering the friendship of the Jew. Yet the verse cited seems to indicate that the problem is from the Jew's perspective. He must avoid close relationships that could lead to intermarriage. True, the reason the Torah gives for prevention of intermarriage is the eventual seduction to idolatry. However, this does not necessarily typify the actual prohibition. It clearly stands in its own right. In fact, it seems to be Rabbinical in origin. Nonetheless, the juxtaposition leads to debate on the root cause for the prohibition. Accordingly, some consider this a Scriptural or quasi-Scriptural prohibition. If it is such, the reason is based on a Scriptural need to distance oneself. If it is Rabbinical, though linked to the verse, it could be related to the other institutions to avoid being party to the gentile's idol-worship.

As we shall see, this has some bearing on our situation. One possible difference is whether the prohibition applies in a case of *aivah*, antisemitism. If the reason is to create a distance, *aivah* would not come into consideration. In fact, the entire purpose is to create some *aivah*. If it is connected to joining in with an idol-worshiper's celebration, there might be a dispensation based on *aivah*. Another difference could arise if the gentile is not an idol-worshiper. If the concern is about causing him to thank his idols, this gentile will not do so. If it is to deter friendships leading to intermarriage, it would apply to all gentiles equally.

The prohibition applies primarily to a feast held in the home of the gentile. He 'invites' the Jew to his feast. However, if the gentile is ultimately the host doing the inviting, many poskim forbid it even on the premises of the Jew. The only permissibility would be when the Jews come to pick up the food to take home with them. If the gentile sends some of the food to the Jew's home it is permissible [assuming it is kosher].

Some poskim distinguish between weddings or other 'occasion' feasts and regular parties. Parties or picnics depend on the following factors: If the majority are Jews, it is permitted to attend, even if it is held in the home of the gentile and he pays for the food. They may even eat and drink at the same table and from the utensils of the gentile [provided they are kosher]. If, however, the gentiles are in the majority or it is an even split, it is forbidden to eat or drink at the same table. This applies to a full meal or even a drink.

[Drinks might mean intoxicating beverages, see below. Snacks with no drinking seem to be permitted. However, it would appear that the nature of the snack could bear on the issue. If the idea is to form a party-style gathering, such as a reception, even simple snacks could be restricted. Thus, bread and cake or cookie/cracker type snacks would almost constitute a meal, especially if they are fancy. A gateau is not made for quick snacking but for formal occasions. On the other hand, potato chips or pretzels might not count as a meal.]

This applies whether the party event is held in the gentile home, a picnic in a park, or even in a Jewish home. It even applies to an event catered by a Jew in his own home and open to his own invited guests. There is no distinction between idolaters and G-d fearing gentiles. All this refers to eating at the same table with less than a majority of Jewish participants. However, if they eat at separate tables, it is permitted to attend even

if the majority overall is gentile. Celebrations of an occasion, such as wedding or other family event, are forbidden as long as the invitations came from the gentile.

There is a general prohibition against drinking gentile wine. The Scriptural level of this prohibition applies to wine that was used in libation to idols. Some of the wine would be removed with the express intent of dedicating it to the idol. It might then be returned to the barrel, or when it was removed the worshiper might have had in mind to 'consecrate' the entire barrel with the removal of this wine. Rabbinically, this was expanded to include any wine touched by a gentile. The reason for this extension is the deterrent against socializing that could lead to intermarriage. Accordingly, it was further expanded to include drinking intoxicating drinks of gentiles. Some add that this extension was made to deter eating meals with the gentiles.

This last extension only applies to drinking them in the 'house' of the gentile. In the case of a bar or store, this means that it is only forbidden inside the premises. It is permitted off the premises. There are a few exceptions to this ruling. It only applies to one who makes it a 'fixed' practice. Thus, one may occasionally drop in for a casual quick drink and then leave, so long as this does not become his regular practice. Certain drinks, such as pomegranate wine, are considered rare. Rabbinical decrees do not apply to rare situations. Just as one may take the drinks outside or to one's home, if he is lodging in a gentile house he may also buy drinks. He may purchase them elsewhere and take them to his lodging house, because this becomes his own 'home'. He may also buy them from his host. This actually touches on *aivah* as well. Since he is the 'guest' of the gentile, he may purchase it. However, he may not sit down to drink together with the gentiles. Some permit honey wine and beer. They are considered too 'ordinary' for the original ban to apply to them. Only 'special' items served at formal functions could lead to intermarriage.

Only casual drinking is permitted in these limited applications. Parties, even where only drinks are served, are banned. This ban, too, is relaxed when the majority of participants are Jewish. Coffee and chocolate parlors are actually subject to debate. Some poskim maintain that the issue of socializing through drinking applies to any social-type drinking. Some say that coffee is worse than beer. While beer is not considered a formal drink, coffee certainly is. Others maintain that, strictly speaking, only intoxicating drinks are forbidden. However, they point out that experience has shown that participation in other forms of social drinking has led to forbidden intimacy. Therefore, one should use discretion and avoid it. Some justify a prevailing practice to drink in coffee shops due to *aivah*. [See Avoda Zara 8a-b 31b-32a, Poskim. Rambam Isurei Biah 17:10. Tur Sh. Ar. Y.D. 114:1 3, 152:1-2, commentaries.]

B) 'Holiday festivities'

The poskim debate whether christianity is considered idolatry for gentiles. Since they include Hashem in their worship, along with other beliefs, they believe in *shituf*, the idea of multiple divine powers. Though this is forbidden to Jews, some maintain that it is permitted to gentiles. Nonetheless, all agree that in the course of their worship, christians are likely to commit idolatry when they do some rituals. Islam is also subject to some debate. The Kaba, a black piece of rock in Mecca, is clearly a remnant of old pagan rituals. In fact, it is the ancient idol called *Markulis* by the Talmud (Mercury). Practitioners

throw stones at it. When Islam was founded, the founders were unable to rid the people from this last idol. However, while they might worship it due to tradition, they have no idea that this is indeed what they are doing. They really do believe in monotheism, and just maintain this tie to paganism.

It is forbidden to intentionally join in with idolaters in their festivities. This could cause them to do more of their idolatry. The day of the observance is forbidden, and up to three days prior to it, depending on the location. The restrictions include commercial activity and anything that could cause the gentile to celebrate more with his gods. Accordingly, if the gentiles are not celebrating for religious reasons, but for tradition's sake or to honor an official, some of the prohibitions do not apply. For this reason many poskim permit dealing with christians on Sundays. Furthermore, some say that if the gentiles observe it as a holiday, but are not so religious about it, the prohibition is less severe.

Accordingly, in most modern countries, where the gentiles are not so religious, one may practice leniency with regard to most commercial activity. However, it is still forbidden to greet them heartily on their festival. Due to *aivah*, one may join in with them if he meets them, but may not enter their homes specially to participate. One should avoid even casual joining in whenever possible. A party held on any day other than the actual holiday is clearly not a religious celebration. While it might have turned into a tradition of sorts, there is no religious significance to it. However, one must be careful when greeting people around the time of the festival not to make open hearty mention of the religious connection. [See Avoda Zara 2a etc. 8a-b etc., Poskim Tur Sh. Ar. Y.D. 147 148:1 4 8 9 12, commentaries. Daniel 11:29, Ibn Ezra.]

On the Parsha ... And you shall say [to Par'oh] "Your servants have been men of livestock from our youth until now, we and our forefathers!" So that you will settle in the land of Goshen, for shepherds are despised by Egypt. [46:34]

The commentaries explain, Yosaif wanted to make sure that the Egyptians would distance the Jews. The Egyptians worshiped sheep. Surely, they would be deeply offended when hearing that the Hebrews tended them and ate them. Nonetheless, Yosaif was not concerned. As long as it was not done in their presence, the Egyptians would tolerate it. [See Ibn Ezra, Daas Zekainim.] Actually, the Egyptians kept their own livestock. They used animals for farming and warfare. They used the wool. They also did other activities with them, treating them as well as humans in some ways. They did not eat them, and they despised those who tended them. Tending them involved treating them as animals. Thus, by claiming this as their occupation, the Bnei Yisroel could be sure that the Egyptians would stay away. In one blow, they both prevented being drawn into their idolatry and permissive lifestyles, and also prevented interaction with them, ultimately saving the Jews from assimilating. There was never a case of intermarriage in all of the Egyptian exile. The only case of a relationship was the result of deceit. In fact, by announcing that they were shepherds, who ate the meat and drank the milk of sheep, the brothers guaranteed a distance between themselves and the Egyptians for any meals. In last week's Parsha, we learn that the Egyptians would not even eat bread with them.



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