

CAN JEWS CELEBRATE NON-JEWISH HOLIDAYS??



A. Don't Be Like Them!

1. Devarim Chapter 7 - Abominations to God

<p>25 The graven images of their gods you will burn with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold that is upon them and take it for yourself, lest you be ensnared by it, for it is an abomination to the Lord, your God.</p>	<p>כה פְּסִילֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶם תִּשְׂרֹפוּן בְּאֵשׁ לֹא תִחַמַּד כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב עֲלֵיהֶם וְלָקַחְתָּ לָךְ פֶּן תִּוְקָשׁ בּוֹ כִּי תוֹעֵבֶת ה' אֵלֶיךָ הוּא:</p>
<p>26 Nor should you bring an abomination into your house, lest you are to be destroyed like it, but you shall utterly detest it, and you shall utterly abhor it; for it is to be destroyed.</p>	<p>כּו וְלֹא תָבִיא תוֹעֵבָה אֶל בֵּיתְךָ וְהָיִיתָ חָרָם כְּמֵהוּ שְׂקִץ תִּשְׂקָצְנוּ וְתֵעֵב תִּתְעַבְּנוּ כִּי חָרָם הוּא:</p>

2. Mishna Avoda Zarah 1:1 - No Holiday Sales

<p>During the three days preceding the festivals of the non-Jews, it is forbidden to do business with them, to lend them something or to borrow something from them, to lend [money] to them or to borrow [money] from them, to resolve your debt to them or to have them resolve their debt to you.</p>	<p>לפני אידיהן של עכו"ם"ז שלשה ימים אסור לשאת ולתת עמהן. להשאילן. ולשאול מהן. להלוותן. וללוות מהן. לפורען. ולפרוע מהן.</p>
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3. Vayikra Chapter 18 - Mitzvah to be Different

<p>3 Like the practice of the land of Egypt, in which you dwelled, you shall not do, and like the practice of the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you, you shall not do, and you shall not follow their statutes.</p>	<p>ג כְּמַעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבַּתֶּם בָּהּ לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וְכְמַעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְבִיא אֲתֶכֶם שָׁמָּה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וּבְחַקֵּיהֶם לֹא תִלְכוּ:</p>
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4. Tosafot (1100-1328 France) Avoda Zara 11a - Limiting the Scope

<p>Therefore the Ri explains that there are two types of practices. One is a practice related to idolatry. One is a practice that is made for their own illogical and senseless reasons. Our Gemara is referring to a practice that is made for idolatry.</p>	<p>לכך פירש ר"י דתרי גווני חוקה הוּא אחד שעושים לשם חוק לעבודת כוכבים ואחד שעושים לשם דעת הבל ושטות שלהם והכא בשמעתין מיירי באותו חק שעושים לשם עבודת כוכבים</p>
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5. Rabbenu Nissim (14th c. Catalonia) - Chiddushim Sanhedrin 52b - Total Nonsense!

<p>In Tosafot (it states) that contemptible (customs) are akin to (copying) practices of the idolaters, as is intended by the Mishna, but the Rabbis don't support his view, and the (proper) explanation is that (customs) that are absolutely illogical (should not be permitted)</p>	<p>בתוספות דניוול הוא זה דקאמר במתני' כלפי חקות הכותיים הית' כוונתו לומר שנוול הוא לעשות כחקות הכותיים ורבנן לא הבינו דבריו וסברו דמשום נוול ממש קאמר</p>
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6. Rema - Shulchan Aruch 178:1 - The Bottom Line

<p>(We forbid) Those practices done as a [Gentile] custom or law with no reason where one suspects that it is an idolatrous practice or that there is a taint of idolatrous origins; however, those customs which are practiced for a reason, such as the physician who wears a special garment to identify him as a doctor, can be done; the same is true for any custom done out of honor or any other reason is permissible.</p>	<p>או בדבר שנהגו למנהג ולחק, ואין טעם בדבר דאכא למיחש בה משום דרכי האמרי ושיש בו שמץ עבודת כוכבים מאבותיהם, אבל דבר שנהגו לתועלת, כגון שדרפן שפל מי שהוא רופא ממחה יש לו מלבוש מיוחד שגפר בו שהוא רופא אמן, מתר ללבשו. וכן שעושין משום כבוד או טעם אחר, מתר</p>
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B. The Great Thanksgiving Debate!

1. Iggerot Moshe, Yoreh Deah 4:11(4) - Compromise View

<p>On the issue of joining with those who think that Thanksgiving is like a holiday to eat a meal: since it is clear that according to their religious law books this day is not mentioned as a religious holiday and that one is not obligated in a meal [according to Gentile religious law] and since this is a day of remembrance to citizens of this country, when they came to reside here either now or earlier, halacha sees no prohibition in celebrating with a meal or with the eating of turkey. One sees similar to this in Kiddushin 66 that Yanai the king made a party after the conquest of kochalit in the desert and they ate vegetables as a remembrance. Nonetheless it is prohibited to establish this as an obligation and religious commandment [mitzvah], and it remains a voluntary celebration now; in this manner -- without the establishment of obligation or religious commandment -- one can celebrate the next year too with a meal. But, I think, nonetheless it is prohibited to establish a fixed day in the year for the celebration... There is also a problem of adding commandments...</p>	<p>אם אסור מצד בחוקותיהם לא תלכו, להשתתף בסעודת יום ההודייה שעושים בארצות הברית ובדבר השתתפות במי שמחשיבים יום ההודייה (טיינסקגיווינג) כעין חג לעשות בו סעודה. הגה לכאורה מכיוון שבספרי דתם לא הוזכר יום זה לחג, וגם לא שיתחייבו בסעודה, וכיוון שהוא יום זכר לאנשי המדינה, שהוא ג"כ שמח בהמדינה שבה לגור לכאן עתה או מכבר, לא מצינו בזה איסור לאו בעשיית שמחה בסעודה, ולא באכילת תרנגול ההודו (אינדיק). וכדמצינו כה"ג בקידושין דף ס"ו ע"א שינאי המלך עשה שמחה בכבישה דמלחמה בכוחלית שבמדבר ואכלו שם ירקות לזכר. אבל ודאי אסור לקבוע זה לחובה ולמצווה, אלא לשמחת הרשות עתה. ובאופן זה בלא קביעות חובה ומצווה יוכל גם לשנה האחרת ג"כ לשמוח ולעשות בו סעודה (ועי' עוד בזה להלן סימן י"ב). אבל אני סובר דמ"מ אסור לעשות יום קבוע בשנה לחוג זה, ורק בשנה ההוא שכבש ינאי המלך, בזה עשה השמחה ולא לקביעות, ויש בה גם משום בל תוסיף... ואף שיש לדון לענין הלאו</p>
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2. Letter of Rabbi David Cohen (G'vul Ya'avetz, Brooklyn) - 9 Nissan 5755 - "Spirit of the Sages"

The celebration of Thanksgiving is something that has been disputed by many rabbis -- some prohibited and maintain that it is a derivative prohibition of idol worship and there are others who completely permit [its celebration]. In my opinion, to eat turkey for the sake of a holiday is prohibited by the rule of Tosafot, Avodah Zara 11a, since this is an irrational rule of theirs and following it is improper. Nonetheless, there is no prohibition for a family to get together on a day when people do not go to work and to eat together; if it is their wish to eat turkey not for the sake of thanks but because they like turkey, that is not prohibited, but the spirit of the Sages does not approve of such conduct, as they are functioning as if they follow the practice of Gentiles.

3. Rules of Engagement¹ - Rabbi Michael J. Broyde (Only One Must be True)

- 1] The holiday has a secular origin.
- 2] The conduct of the individuals celebrating the holiday can be rationally explained independent of the holiday customs.
- 3] The idolatrous origins of the holiday are so deeply hidden that they have disappeared, and the celebrations can be attributed to some secular source or reason.
- 4] The activities memorialized by the holiday are actually consistent with the Jewish tradition.

C. Happy New Year!

1. Origins of New Year's Day² - Happy Birthday Janus!

The Romans dedicated this day to Janus, the god of gates, doors, and beginnings. The month of January was named after Janus, who had two faces, one looking forward and the other looking backward. This suggests that New Year's celebrations are founded on pagan traditions.

2. Terumat Hadeshen (Israel Isserlin 15th c. Austria) 195 - Fruit Cakes

In a number of cities Jews are accustomed to send [gifts] to pastors and leaders on the eighth day after Christmas which is called New Years. Is there an issue here or not? The answer is that Jews should send such [gifts] during the day before [December 31st] or after and not on the day of the holiday, itself. ...And if the day before the holiday falls out on Shabbat, **one may send on the day of the holiday itself as there is a matter of hatred [eiva] (if one sends later than that or more before then.)**

בכמה עיירות נוהגים היהודים לשלוח דורונות לכומרים ולשלטונים ביום שמיני לניתל כשמתחדשין להם השנה יש חשש זהירות בדבר או לאו: תשובה יראה דיש ליהדר בזה שלא ישלחו ממש באותו יום אלא יום קודם או אחריו... ואירע שחל בשבת שלא יוכל לשלוח בו נראה דא"צ ליהדר מלשלוח ביום עצמו דאי יאחר תהוי ליה איבה

¹ http://www.tfdixie.com/special/thanksg.htm#N_28_

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Year%27s_Day

3. Iggerot Moshe, Even Haezer 2:13 – Not for Ba’alei Nephesh

<p>The first day of the year for them [January 1] and Thanksgiving is not prohibited according to law, but pious people [balai nephesh] should be strict.</p>	<p>ויום ראשון משנה שלהם וכן טענקס גיווינג אין לאסור מדינא אבל בעלי נפש יש להם להחמיר.</p>
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D. All Hallow’s Eve

1. Origins of Halloween - <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Halloween>

<p>Halloween had its origins in the festival of <u>Samhain</u> among the <u>Celts</u> of ancient Britain and <u>Ireland</u>...During the <u>Samhain</u> festival the souls of those who had died were believed to return to visit their homes, and those who had died during the year were believed to journey to the otherworld. People set bonfires on hilltops for relighting their hearth fires for the winter and to frighten away evil spirits, and they sometimes wore masks and other disguises to avoid being recognized by the ghosts thought to be present...When the Romans conquered the Celts in the 1st century ce, they added their own festivals of Feralia, commemorating the passing of the dead, and of Pomona, the goddess of the harvest....Along with other festivities, the celebration of Halloween was largely forbidden among the early American colonists...When large numbers of immigrants, including the Irish, went to the United States beginning in the mid 19th century, they took their Halloween customs with them, and in the 20th century Halloween became one of the principal U.S. holidays, particularly among children.</p>
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2. Mishna Gittin 5:8, 9 - Candy Will bring Peace!

<p>These are the things they said [i.e., enacted] due to "ways of peace:" A Kohen should read [the Torah] first, and after him a Levite, and after him an Israelite due to "ways of peace;"...We may aid non-Jews [who works in the fields] during the Sabbatical year...</p>	<p>ואלו דברים אמרו מפני דרכי שלום. כהן קורא ראשון. ואחריו לוי. ואחריו ישראל. מפני דרכי שלום...ומחזיקין ידי גוים בשביעית...</p>
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