

Is it always forbidden to walk into a church?

Rabbi Yosef Kushner

**Question:** We all know that a Jew shouldn't enter a house of *avodah zara*. But what if he is going in for reason unrelated to religion, such as to meet someone there? Is that also prohibited?

**Answer:** The Shulchan Aruch rules that one shouldn't go into a house of *avodah zara* for any reason, nor should one enter the courtyard of such a place. This halacha is based on the rule of "*maaras ayin*", not giving off the appearance of having committed a sin. The prevalent view of the Poskim is that it is forbidden to enter even at a time when worship is not taking place and even for a non-religious event. The Prisha says that one cannot enter the courtyard of a church to attend the coronation of a king, even though this is not a religious ceremony. While some Poskim disagree and only forbid entering a house of *avodah zara* during times of worship, the majority view forbids entrance at all times. The Gemara further says that one must stay at least 4 *amos* away from a house of "*meenus*", heresy, which includes even some places that wouldn't fall under the category of being a house of *avodah zara*.

According to all of this, it would seem that it is forbidden to enter a church for any reason. Sometimes during election season, voting is held in a church. It is quite clear that it's highly problematic to enter such a place to vote. Rav Moshe Sternbuch does say in a *teshuva* that "*b'shaas had'chak*", under pressing circumstances, it may be permitted, but the general understanding seems to be that one shouldn't enter at any time, and certainly not if there is any other option.

I sometimes receive calls from investors who purchased a multiunit property that has a church located in one of the units. I tell them that before we get involved in discussing the other relevant halachos, the first thing they should know is that it is forbidden for them to walk into the church under any circumstances.