

Text Evasion

February 1, 2024

Q A non-Jewish coworker approached me to discuss some questions he had about the Bible. How should I handle this?



A You should try your best to avoid such conversations. Chazal forbid the teaching of Torah to non-Jews, based on two *psukim*: The Gemara in Chagigah (13a) cites “He relates His words to Yaakov...He did not do so for any other nation” (Tehillim 147:19), and the Gemara in Sanhedrin (59a) references the Torah being called “the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov” (Dvarim 33:4).

If circumstances don’t allow for a change of subject, you have upon whom to rely. The Shiltei Hagiborim (Avodah Zarah 5b) says the prohibition only applies to Torah *shebe’al peh*, not Torah *shebichsav*. R’ Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe Y.D. 3:90) adduces support for this view from the command that the words of the Torah be inscribed on large stones in seventy languages when Klal Yisrael enters Eretz Yisrael, which was to ensure that the nations of the world would be able to read it (Dvarim 27:8); but R’ Moshe remains inconclusive. The Netziv (Meishiv Davar 2:77), however, presents the same proof as dispositive.

According to the Maharsha (Chagigah 13a), it is only the depths of Torah that are restricted to Jews. R’ Moshe (ibid.) clarifies that Mishnah, Shulchan Aruch and other such works of codified Torah may be taught, but analytical texts like Gemara may not.

One may teach a non-Jew who is converting (Maharsha Shabbos 31a; R’ Moshe ibid.).

May Torah be published to the internet, where it can be accessed by anyone? R’ Moshe (ibid.), writing to a Torah lecturer who learned that a regular attendee of his talks wasn’t Jewish, says it isn’t a problem: The man wasn’t invited and acted on his own volition, and it is not the Jew’s responsibility to prevent a non-Jew from transgressing. This ruling can be applied to the dissemination of Torah online.