

Rabbi Daniel Dombroff

Question: "My sister has an Amazon Prime account. Although I do not find it worthwhile to purchase my own account, I do occasionally order from Amazon. Is it permitted to use my sister's Prime account to order and receive free shipping (and whatever other benefits it entails)?"

Answer: We will assume from the question that Amazon does not allow use of an Amazon Prime account for those not living in the same household as the owner of the account (which appears to be correct). Although one should clarify the exact regulations of using a Prime account with Amazon, the basic issue at play here is one of *mat'eh Akum*, misleading a non-Jew. One who uses another's account is misrepresenting themselves as eligible for the benefit of free shipping (and any other benefits offered) improperly, since they did not pay for it.

The halachic status of *mat'eh akum* is a complex issue. Potential *chilul Hashem* is a very important factor which should also be taken into account (see, e.g., Rema, C.M. 348:2); The Gra and others, hold that it also violates the prohibition against *geneivas da'as* (misleading another), which applies to non-Jews as well as Jews.

It is also worthwhile to mention as background that concerning actual theft from a non-Jew (*gezel Akum*), the Tosefta states that in a certain sense, it is more severe of a problem than stealing from a Jew. The reason is that in the case of a Jew that steals from another Jew, the *nigzal* (one from whom something was stolen) can see the broader picture of the person aside from his act of thievery, and understand that he has other positive characteristics. In contrast, a non-Jew who is stolen from may only interact with the Jew in this context of theft and may think that this Jew is a terrible person in all respects, thus causing a serious *chillul Hashem*.

The *Be'er HaGolah* also makes a noteworthy comment that he saw many people become wealthy as a result of actions involving *Mat'eh Akum*, but ultimately they lost all of their wealth.

Rabbi Yaakov Schneidman, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Beis Moshe in Scranton, offers a tremendously illuminating insight in this context. We know that a person's *parnasa* (livelihood) is determined for the entire year on Rosh Hashanah; our responsibility is to do our *hishtadlus* (effort) to earn an honest living. Therefore, the primary question one must ask himself is which activities are worthy attempts at *hishtadlus* to ensure that Hashem provides the livelihood that has been fixed for him and which attempts are not.