

# Halachos of Avodah Zara: Part IV Shiur

## BUILDING OR ENHANCING A PLACE OF WORSHIP

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A TRANSCRIPTION OF THE YORUCHA CURRICULUM WEEKLY SHIUR VIDEO

### WORKING ON A HOUSE OF AVODAH ZARA:

Reuven owns a lighting company. He receives an order to sell light fixtures to a church. Is this permitted?

In this instance, the prohibitions that we mentioned in the previous segments of this series will likely not apply. Selling the lighting does not involve entering the church, so that is not a problem. The lighting itself is not used as part of the worship in the church, so there is no problem of *lifnei iver*. Furthermore, Reuven is not providing the church with any benefit, as he is actually profiting off them, rather than the opposite; therefore, this problem also does not exist.

There is, however, an additional prohibition that may apply. The Mishnah in Avodah Zara (16A) says that one is permitted to build a "*bimushya*", which Rashi translates as an altar that sacrifices for an *avodah zara* were placed upon; however, it is forbidden to build a "*kippa*", a dome, which apparently is the place where the actual *avodah zara* is kept. Rashi explains that one may build any part of a house of *avodah zara*, as long as one doesn't build the actual areas that service the idol itself.

Tosafos disagree and state that it is forbidden to build any part of a house of *avodah zara*. He says that it is only permitted to build the courtyard outside the building.

The Tur cites both Rashi and Tosafos's opinions. The Shulchan Aruch rules like Rashi – that it is permitted to build any part of a house of *avodah zara* besides the actual place of the *avodah zara*. The Taz, however, rules like Tosafos – that it is prohibited to build any part of a house of *avodah zara* – as do the Shach and Vilna Gaon. We previously have mentioned that the Poskim generally urge people to be stringent in matters regarding *avodah zara*; therefore, the definitive ruling is that one should not build any part of a church.

The Taz adds that in addition to the actual building, one should not beautify a house of *avodah zara* by installing decorative windows and the like. The Shach agrees and writes clearly that one should not beautify a house of *avodah zara* in any way. As an example, he says that one should not sell decorative wax to a house of *avodah zara* to be used to make candles to beautify the premises. We see that in addition to not being allowed to beautify a church, one also may not sell the church any material that will be used to make it beautiful. Rav Moshe Feinstein describes the prohibitions to build or beautify a place of *avodah zara* as a "*takana*", a Rabbinic decree.

While it is forbidden to build or beautify a church, it would be permitted to have your non-Jewish worker do a small job, such as fixing a pipe, as this would not constitute either building or beautifying. Whether it would be permitted to do a big job, such as installing a new roof, is questionable, as this may be considered "rebuilding" the structure.

Accordingly, if a church would make an order for standard construction material, such as drywall for example, a Jewish vendor would be permitted to sell it to them, as he is not building the church and he is not selling them anything that will beautify the church. As far as the prohibition of *lifnei iver*, we have previously quoted the opinion of the Rema, who states that there is no problem of *lifnei iver* if one sells a house of *avodah zara* something that they could have purchased elsewhere. According to this opinion, this prohibition would not apply in this case, as the church could buy the drywall from someone else.

Selling items that beautify a church, however, such as stained-glass windows, would be a problem. This would also mean that one would not be allowed to sell fancy carpeting or anything else that adds grandeur to a church.

Having said all this, we can rule that if Reuven is merely selling standard light bulbs to the church, there would be no prohibition. If, however, he is selling nice light fixtures that will beautify the building, it would be prohibited. In any case, it is definitely prohibited for him to enter the church to install the lighting.

Moreover, although we said in Part 1 of this series that it would be permitted to have one's non-Jewish manager enter a church to do an inspection, it would be forbidden to have him do a job, such as installing lighting, on a Jew's behalf. This is because the Maharam Shick and other Poskim say clearly that the rule of "*amira l'akum*", the prohibition to have a non-Jew perform a forbidden act on your behalf, applies to all prohibitions, not just to hilchos Shabbos; therefore, it would apply to doing forbidden work on a house of idol worship. This means that anything Reuven would not be allowed to do, he also may not have his non-Jewish worker do for him.

The Chazon Ish (Yoreh Deah 62) adds a tremendous *chiddush*. We've learned that according to the Rema, one may sell an animal to a house of *avodah zara* that they will use as part of their worship, as long as they could buy that animal elsewhere, and this would not be a transgression of *lifnei iver*. Still, writes the Chazon Ish, it is still forbidden to sell candles or other

items that are used to beautify a house of *avodah zara*, even if they could be purchased from somewhere else, because the prohibition is a *takana* and not because of *lifnei iver*. The reason we consider this to be a huge *chiddush* is because the prohibition of *lifnei iver* is a *d'ohraysa*, while the prohibition to sell items to a church that are used to beautify it is simply a *takana d'rabanan*. It is very difficult to say that a *d'rabanan* is more stringent than a *d'ohraysa*. Still and all, the Chazon Ish does say this *chiddush*.

In any event, we said previously that the practical ruling follows the opinion of the Gr"m who argues with the Rema and forbids selling items used for worship to a church, even if they could buy these items elsewhere. Accordingly, it is always forbidden to sell a church anything used for their service, as well as anything used to beautify the premises, although it is permitted to sell them paper goods or drywall or other items that are not used for worship or to beautify the place.

### IS THERE AVODAH ZARA TODAY?

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In conclusion, it bears mentioning that there are some people who claim that genuine *avodah zara* does not exist in today's times because adherents of contemporary religions do not actually engage in worshipping idols. While this may be true, even today's adherents still recite prayers to their deities. The Mahram Shick and Rav Moshe Feinstein rule that prayers to any entity other than Hashem also constitutes *avodah zara*. Accordingly, since a church is a place where prayers are recited to a deity that is *avodah zara*, even today's churches are considered to be houses of *avodah zara*.

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