

# Can Non-Jews Serve Idols?

PARSHA INSIGHTS - EMOR (5758)

*Why Should We ACCEPT the Offering of a Gentile and REJECT That of a Jew?*

“A person (*ish*), a person (*ish*) from the House of Yisroel...who will offer his sacrifice, for all their vows and for all their free-will offerings...” (22:18). Why is the word “*ish*” or “man” - stated twice in our *pasuk* [verse]? In the *Gemara Menachos* 73B and in *Toras Kohanim (Sifra)* 104, we are taught that it comes to include non-Jews. They are authorized to bring *korbonos* [sacrifices] as vows or voluntary donations. The *Malbim* on this *Sifra* points out that the first word “*ish*” signifies EVERY man, including a gentile. The second “*ish*” goes with the words “*mibais Yisroel*” [from the House of Israel], and it refers to Jews.

We see that voluntary *korbonos* [sacrifices] are accepted from non-Jews as well as from Jews. In fact, there are cases in which Hashem welcomes such contributions ONLY from gentiles, rejecting them if they come from members of *Bnai Yisroel* [the Children of Israel]. How can this be so?

The *Gemara Chulin* 5A enlightens us in the following way. Let us say there are two people, a Jew and a non-Jew, who both worship idols. What if they both bring *korbonos* to the *Bais Hamikdosh* [Temple]? Shouldn't we reject both of them as the offerings of sinners, since gentiles are also forbidden to cast off the yoke of Heaven and serve idols? No, declares the *Gemara*. The non-Jew is allowed to bring his sacrifice, but the Jew is prevented from doing so. This is learned from the beginning of *Sefer Vayikra* [the Book of Leviticus], in 1:2. “A man who will offer FROM YOU a sacrifice to Hashem...” - the word “*mikem*” or “**from** you” - teaches that only some OF YOU (FROM YOU) may offer *korbonos*. Not all of you Jews are licensed to do so. Which Jew is excluded from this privilege? A *mumar* [sinful individual] is omitted. The *Gemara* clarifies that this distinction between an upstanding citizen and an idolater only exists concerning *Bnai Yisroel*. Regarding non-Jews, there is no difference; *korbonos* are received despite an idolatrous lifestyle on the part of the contributor. Remember, this is talking about free-will offerings. Such *korbonos* are not accepted from a Jewish idol worshipper, but are welcome from the hands of such a gentile.

The perplexity is obvious. Why is Hashem pleased with the offering of an idolatrous gentile, but He rejects the *korbon* [sacrifice] of an idolatrous Jew? Rav Zalman Sorotzkin wonders about this, and he solves the mystery in his words on 1:2 and also on today's *parsha* [Torah portion], 22:18.

He states the question as mentioned above: “A Jew and a non-Jew, both of them idol worshippers, who brought offerings - we accept it from the gentile, but we don't accept it from the Jew!” Here is the answer given in 1:2. The non-Jew being discussed was born and educated in paganism. This is his entire upbringing, so it is quite surprising that he suddenly decides to bring a sacrifice to Hashem. A spark of sound logic has entered his brain; he is entertaining the possibility that there is a Supreme Master of the universe! Perhaps graven images are not in charge of human destiny! He makes up his mind to bring an offering in the *Bais Hamikdosh* in Yerushalayim, the sacred abode for the *Shechina* [Divine Presence]. This, in the words of the Lutzker Rav, is considered PROGRESS on the part of a heathen, an unbeliever. Perhaps, with the passage of time, this idolater will completely forsake his images. He might end up serving the Creator alone. For this reason, his *korbon* is accepted; it will help bring him closer to Hashem. Recall that the word “*korbon*” has its root in “*korav*”, a verb that denotes coming close, approaching the *emes* [absolute truth] and Divinity of Hashem.

On the other hand, let us examine the case of an idolatrous Jew attempting to offer a *korbon*. This person was born into a Torah lifestyle, educated in authentic Judaism, and has now chosen to serve images. True, he still wishes to show allegiance to Hashem, since he is offering a *korbon*. But he is guilty of *SHITUF* [joining another perceived deity with the Master of the Universe]. He has clearly strayed from the path. If we welcome his contribution to the service of the *Bais Hamikdosh*, his sacrifice, we are sending him a distorted message. Accepting the *korbon* of a paganistic Jew is condoning his attitude that one may worship Hashem plus some other force, *chas v'shalom* [heaven forbid]. He will be content with his approach to religion, assuming that it is fine to practice as a heathen, as long as G-d Almighty is ALSO respected and revered. However, says the *Oznaim L'Torah*, if we refuse his *korbon* until he ceases his idolatrous practices, he will get the hint. He will realize that one is not allowed to compromise, one is totally forbidden to serve Hashem together with other gods. He needs to make that ultimate

decision - Hashem, or idols. With these thoughts, he is likely to repent, since he also wants HIS *korbon* to be received in the Holy Temple.

The other reason is expressed by the *Oznaim L'Torah* on our *parsha*, 22:18. Why does Hashem approve of a gentile's *korbon*, even that of an idol worshipper? Rav Sorotzkin first restates an idea mentioned earlier, that this non-Jew is exhibiting faith in Hashem as the Supreme Ruler, despite his general worship of idols. If so, why not commend the sacrifice of an idolatrous Jew as well? The *Oznaim L'Torah* quotes the famous words of the *Rama*, Rav Moshe Isserles, in *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 156:1. "They (the gentiles) are not warned against *shituf* (pairing up idols with their worship of Hashem)". In other words, it seems from this *Rama* that the prohibition of idolatry for a non-Jew is if he EXCHANGES G-d for graven images. If he merely JOINS paganistic rites with his service of the Creator, he is not necessarily violating the commandments incumbent on him. This *halacha* [law] is hotly debated (see *Aruch Hashulchan* who says it relates only to **oaths** of *shituf*, also see numerous sources brought in *Shailos Uteshuvos V'shav Hakohen* section 38), but this is what the *Rama* himself states, based on an earlier source. With this in mind, our matter becomes magnificently clear. A non-Jew, a ben Noach, is permitted to practice *shituf* according to this *Rama*. True, he is making a grave error in believing that idols have any power at all. But he still feels that Hashem is to be exalted and worshipped. Consequently, his *korbon* is accepted. On the other hand, it is well known that a Jew is strictly forbidden to practice any form of idolatry, including *shituf*, a combined worship of Hashem and another god. Thus, the *korbon* of such a Jew is rejected.

On this topic of *SHITUF*, pairing up other deities with Hashem, I once heard a brilliant insight from an outstanding *talmid chacham* [wise scholar]. *Shituf* also exists today, albeit not in the primitive form of pagan worship. A person living in modern society might also be guilty of *shituf*. One who wants both lifestyles, Torah plus physical indulgence, resembles the *ba'al shituf* [one who espouses belief in Hashem plus other gods]. A person who expects gratification in all its forms, spiritual purity together with worldly addictions, will eventually have to choose between the two. **They are mutually exclusive.** A person who idolizes wealth, constantly pursuing fleeting pleasures that can be bought with money, will find it difficult to immerse himself in Hashem's Torah. It is all a question of emphasis: Bodily enjoyments must be utilized only to provide us with the strength and tranquility needed to serve our Creator, as demonstrated throughout *Chazal* [our Sages]. They must not be our central focus. Self-worship and worship of G-d do not mix.

We see that the principles of *korbonos* teach Jews how to live in **all** generations.

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