

Halachically Speaking

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Following The Customs Of The *Goyim*

Sponsored

לרפואה שלמה חנה חיה בת מזל

The *Torah*¹ states “one may not follow in the ways of the *goyim*.” The *Rambam*² writes one should be different than the *goyim* in his actions, knowledge and in his understanding. There is a major dispute among the *Rishonim* and *Achronim* as to the parameters of this *issur*.³ A practice which the *goyim* do for their *avodah zara*, is forbidden for a *Yid* to do, even if the *Torah* says it is a Jewish custom.⁴ The *Maharik*⁵ writes that there are *goyish* practices, whose reasons and origins cannot be found, and are still forbidden to *Yiddin* since it would appear that we are copying them. Furthermore, all immodest practices that the *goyim* are associated with, is forbidden to a *Yid*. Most *poskim* agree with the guidelines of the *Maharik*.⁶ However, the *Gra*⁷ says the only thing that is permitted is a practice which was possibly originated in Jewish circles, if it was not initiated by the *goyim*. The *Chinuch*⁸ says the reason for this *mitzvah* is in order that the *Yiddin* should distance ourselves from the *goyim*.

Goyish Names

The *Medrash*⁹ states the *Yiddin* were redeemed from *Mitzrayim* through the merit of four things: one of them is that they did not change their names. The *Maharam Shik*¹⁰ is of the opinion that one who has a *goyish* name has transgressed the *issur* of “following the customs of the *goyim*.” To stress this point, it is brought down that the last name *Shik* stands for *Shem Yisroel Kodesh*, to show one should only have a Jewish name.¹¹ What is the explanation as to why one would have a non-Jewish name? *Horav Moshe Feinstein zt”l*¹² says that many non-Jewish names today have gained acceptance because they originated from countries in which the Jews lived

¹ *Parshas Kedoshim* 2:23, see *Rashi, Eben Ezra*, Refer to *Parshas Achrei Mos* 18:3.

² *Hilchos Avoda Zara* 11:1.

³ Refer to *Tosfas Avoda Zara* 12b “v’ey,” *Rashi and Ramban Vayikra* 19:9, *Bach Y.D.* 178, *Bais Yosef*, *Pri Hasadeh* 1:48, *Minhag Yisroel Torah* 6:pages 19-28 in depth.

⁴ Refer to *Tosfas Avoda Zara* 11a “v’ehi,” *Ran Sanhedrin* 52b, see *Bach Y.D.* 178, *Shulchan Aruch Hamikutzar* 144:5.

⁵ *Shoresh* 88, *Bais Yosef* *ibid*.

⁶ Refer to *Darchoi Moshe* 1, *Rama* 178:1, *Maharam Shik Y.D.* 178.

⁷ *Y.D.* 178:7, *Darchoi Teshuva Y.D.* 178:14.

⁸ *Mitzvah* 262. Refer to *Shulchan Aruch Hamikutzar* 144:2.

⁹ *Vayikra* 32:5, *Shir Hashirim perek* 4:12:1, *Medrash Tehillim* 111:14, refer to *Bnei Yissochor Nissin* 4:10 *tiul b’pardes* why it was something special that they did not change their names when in *Mitzrayim*.

¹⁰ *Y.D.* 169.

¹¹ *Minchas Shmuel* 1:page 191.

¹² *O.C.* 4:66, see *E.H.* 4:102, *O.C.* 5:10:1, *Maharam Shik Y.D.* 199.

in.¹³ The names taken eventually were accepted as Jewish names. The aforementioned *Medrash* should be a good reason as to why one should choose a Jewish name. Nonetheless, some say the *Medrash* is only referring to the Jews who left *Mitzrayim*, since the *Yiddin* had not yet become a nation, and needed to keep their Jewish names and language as a distinction between them and the *Mitzrim*.¹⁴ It is permitted for one to call his child a name that is a Jewish name but translated into a different language. For example, one can call his child Moshe-Moses.¹⁵ Although having a *goyish* name might not be an *issur*, according to everyone, the *poskim* stress the importance of only having a *Yiddish* name.¹⁶

The “Red String”-*Ruita Bendel*

Many people have the “custom” of wearing a red string on their wrist to avoid any *ayin hara*.¹⁷ The *Tosefta* in *Shabbos*¹⁸ says tying a red string on one’s finger is *Darchei Hu’emorey*, and some *seforim* say “tying a red string” (anywhere) is *Darchei Hu’emorey*.¹⁹ There is an opinion in the *poskim* that anything which is not stated in the *Gemora* is not a problem of *Darchei Hu’emorey*.²⁰ The *seforim* bring down that the color red does help protect against *ayin hara*.²¹ The *Be’er Moshe*²² says the custom is that one may place a red string to ward off any *ayin hara*.²³ The *Zohar* says that looking at *techeiles* avoids *ayin hara*.²⁴ Some explain the reason for wearing a red string is because red dye was used in the *bais hamikdash*, and it came from a worm. *Horav Shamshon Refoel Hirsch zt”l* points out that the worm is the lowest of the creatures and it was used for a holy purpose. *Ayin hara* is if a person is blessed with good, and he becomes haughty, it might cause him to be judged by *Hashem*. The red string is reminiscent of the lowly worm, and each time one looks at it, he is reminded to be humble, and this will hopefully save him from any *ayin hara*.²⁵ It is stated in *seforim* that if a pregnant woman one wears the “strings” from *Kever Rochel* she will carry her baby to full term.²⁶ It is not clear where the custom to wrap the string seven times around the *kever* originated from.²⁷ Instead of relying on these red strings to ward off the avoid *ayin hara*, one should work on himself to be more humble, and in this way will be protected from any *ayin hara*.²⁸ One who is wearing the red string because he thinks it helps to prevent any *ayin hara*, should not wear it outside on *Shabbos* because of carrying.²⁹

¹³ Refer to *Chasam Sofer E.H. 2:21*.

¹⁴ *Maharal Gevuras Hashem 43:pages 164-165, Igros Moshe ibid.*

¹⁵ *Tzafnas Pa’neach 275:page 220, Otzer Habris 1:6:6:1, Shulchan Aruch Hamikutzar 144:footnote 19, Avnei Yushfei 1:196:4.*

¹⁶ *Sefer Chassidim 1139:pages 567-568, Igros Moshe E.H. 3:35, O.C. 5:10:1, Be’er Moshe 8:19:8, Yufei Leleiv Y.D. 3:265:page 88b.* Refer to *Sharshai Minhag Ashkenaz 1:pages 444-448* on this *inyun* in its entirety.

¹⁷ Refer to *Chasdei Dovid Tosefta Shabbos 7:1:page 49, Kesav V’hakabbalah Bamidbar 15:39, V’yan Dovid 3:54, Rivevos Ephraim 8:pages 24-25, Minhag Yisroel Torah 6:pages 137-138.* The *sefer Kotton V’hilchoseha 1:teshuvas* from *Horav Chaim Kanievesky Shlita 21:page 21* says one should not place the red string on his child.

¹⁸ 7:1, see 8:4.

¹⁹ *Reishis Chuchma perek derech eretz 4:16, Darchei Teshuva Y.D. 178:21.*

²⁰ *Bais Yosef Y.D. 178, Rav Poalim Y.D. 2:29, Shurei Beracha Y.D. 179:3.*

²¹ *Divrei Torah 2:71.*

²² 8:36:3. Refer to *Ohr Yisroel 26:pages 182-185.*

²³ Refer to *Rivevos Ephraim 8:page 26.*

²⁴ *Parshas Shalch* page 163b (old print), see *Zohar Parshas Noso, Lev Chaim 3:99 “v’al fal pi,” Yufei Leliev E.H 62:31.*

²⁵ Based on an article from the *Ohr Somayach Website.*

²⁶ Refer to *Kol Bo* on *hilchos milah (Kesei Eliyahu)* page 129, *Ohr Yisroel ibid:page 185.*

²⁷ Refer to *Matei Ephraim 603:7.*

²⁸ *V’ein Lumo Michshal 2:page 105:15.* If one feels that he will be protected from *ayin hara* by wearing the red string then there is nothing wrong with wearing it (*Horav Yisroel Belsky Shlita*).

²⁹ *Horav Yisroel Belsky Shlita.*

Flowers/Greenery In Shuls For Shavuos

The custom is to place greenery in *shuls* on *Shavuos*,³⁰ and many have the custom to place them in their homes as well.³¹ Some say this is done for *simchas haregel*.³² Others say the reason is as a remembrance of *Har Sinai*, which was surrounded with beautiful greenery at the time the *Torah* was given to *Klal Yisroel*.³³ The *seforim* mention many other reasons for placing greenery on *Shavuos*.³⁴ Another custom is to place trees in *shuls* for *Shavuos*,³⁵ and the *Magen Avraham*³⁶ states the reason is because on *Shavuos* one is judged for the fruits of a tree. According to this reason one should only take branches of a fruit tree and place it in the *shuls*,³⁷ however, the custom is not like this.³⁸ It would seem that one should not place artificial flowers etc.³⁹ Many have the custom to place greenery etc. on the floor, but the custom is not so.⁴⁰ The *G'ra*⁴¹ was against the *minhag* of placing flowers-greenery in *shuls* for *Shavuos*, as this was the custom of the *goyim* who decorated their homes and churches with greenery during their holidays, and the *G'ra* believed this *minhag* should be abolished. Many *poskim* go in accordance with the ruling of the *G'ra*.⁴² Some say the *G'ra* wanted to abolish both the placing of flowers and trees in *shuls*.⁴³ However, *Horav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt"l*⁴⁴ says the *G'ra* only wanted to abolish the custom of placing trees in *shuls* and not flowers. The custom in most places is to place flowers and branches of trees in the *shuls* for *Shavuos*.⁴⁵ Some place nice smelling greenery on the *sefer torah* in honor or *Matan Torah*.⁴⁶ Some have the custom to place pictures of flowers in their windows.⁴⁷

Chupah In A Shul/Indoors

The custom is to have a *chupah* either outdoors or indoors under an open sky.⁴⁸ The reason for this is a *siman tov* for one to have “as many children just as the number of the stars in the sky.”⁴⁹ The custom to have the roof

³⁰ *Maharil* page 160, *Leket Yosher* page 103, *Yosef Ometz* 851:page 187, *Rama O.C.* 494:3, *Magen Avraham* 5, *Chok Yaakov* 7, *Levush* 1, *Yalkut Gershuney* 494:3, *Shulchan Aruch Harav* 15, *Lekutei Maharich* 3:page 574 (new), *Mishnah Berurah* 10, *Aruch Ha'shulchan* 6, *Yalkut Yosef* 5:page 443. Refer to *Minhag Avoseinu B'yudeinu* 2:pages 589-590:footnote 85 why this a custom only on *Shavuos*.

³¹ Refer to *Yosef Ometz* *ibid*.

³² *Maharil* *ibid*. Refer to *Minhag Avoseinu B'yudeinu* 2:page 578:footnote 22

³³ *Rama* *ibid*, *Levush* 1, *Siddur Yaavetz* 2:page 174:2, *Shulchan Aruch Harav* 14, *Lekutei Maharich* *ibid*, *Mishnah Berurah* 10, *Aruch Ha'shulchan* *ibid*, *Kaf Ha'chaim* 53, *Da'as Torah* 494, *Minhag Yisroel Torah* 494:7, *Yalkut Yosef* *ibid*, *Minhag Avoseinu B'yudeinu* 2:page 582:footnote 33, *Orchos Rabbeinu* 2:page 99:7.

³⁴ Refer to *Birchei Yosef* 494:6, *Kaf Ha'chaim* 494:53, *Chasam Sofer Droshos Shevuos* page 576, *Bnei Yissochor Nissin* 4:7-8 pages 135-136b (new), *Minhag Avoseinu B'yudeinu* 2:pages 578-588.

³⁵ Refer footnote 34, and *Magen Avraham* 5.

³⁶ 5, see *Be'er Heitiv* 7, *Siddur Yaavetz* 2:page 174:2, *Chok Yaakov* *ibid*, *Elya Rabbah* 2, *Shulchan Aruch Harav* 15, *Mishnah Berurah* 10, *Kaf Ha'chaim* 56, *Yalkut Yosef* *ibid*.

³⁷ *Minhag Avoseinu B'yudeinu* 2:page 590, see *Natey Gavriel Shevuos* 9:5:footnote 13 in depth (new).

³⁸ *Minhag Avoseinu B'yudeinu* 2:page 590:footnote 86.

³⁹ *Minhag Avoseinu B'yudeinu* 2:page 581:footnote 32.

⁴⁰ *Minhag Avoseinu B'yudeinu* 2:page 576:footnote 13.

⁴¹ *Massei Rav* 191, *Chai Adom* 131:13, *Chuchmas Adom* 89:1, *Darchei Chaim V'Sholom* 637:page 206, *Mishnah Berurah* 10, *Aruch Ha'shulchan* 6, *Kaf Ha'chaim* 56, *Igros Moshe Y.D.* 4:11:5, *Mekadesh Yisroel Shavuos* 62:page 180, *Orchos Rabbeinu* *ibid*.

⁴² *Aruch Ha'shulchan* 6, *Igros Moshe* *ibid*, see *Igros Moshe* intro to *O.C.* 5:page 6.

⁴³ Refer to *Mishnah Berurah* *ibid*, *Igros Moshe* *ibid*, *Orchos Rabbeinu* 2:page 99:7.

⁴⁴ *Ve'alu Lo Uvol* 1:page 184:289, see *Mishnah Berurah* 494:10 who seems to say this as well. Refer to *Chuchmas Adom* *ibid*.

⁴⁵ *Yalkut Gershuney* *ibid*, *Lekutei Maharich* *ibid*, *Da'as Torah* *ibid*, *Yechaveh Da'as* 4:33, *Yalkut Yosef* 5:page 443, *Mekadesh Yisroel Shevuos* page 180, *Piskei Teshuvos* 494:10, *Minhag Yisroel Torah* 494:7:pages 363-364, *Minhag Avosinu B'yudeinu* 2:pages 600-602. One may not use *masser* money to buy flowers to hang up for *Shavuos* (*Mekadesh Yisroel Shavuos* 66 new). As far as moving a door that has flowers hanging on it refer to *V'Yan Dovid* 1:62.

⁴⁶ *Minhag Avoseinu B'yudeinu* 2:page 602.

⁴⁷ *Natey Gavriel Shevuos* 9:8, *Minhag Avoseinu B'yudeinu* 2:page 603.

⁴⁸ *Rama E.H.* 61:1, *Bais Shmuel E.H.* 30:9, *Chasam Sofer E.H.* 98, *Aruch Ha'shulchan E.H.* 61:21, *Otzar Haposkim* 61:14:1, *Chazzon Yeshaya* page 280.

⁴⁹ *Rama* *ibid*. Refer to *Sdei Chemed Chassan V'Kallah* 1:pages 11-13.

open in an indoor building, is considered under the sky.⁵⁰ The *Sefardim* do not perform their *chupahs* under an open sky.⁵¹ There is a major discussion in the *poskim* whether one is allowed to have a *chupah* in a *shul*, or in any closed area, since it may seem that one is following in the ways of the *goyim*, who perform their weddings indoors in their churches.⁵² *Horav Moshe Feinstein zt"l*⁵³ is of the opinion that there is no problem with performing a *chupah* in a *shul*. It is obvious that one is not doing this to follow in the ways of the *goyim*.⁵⁴

The Wedding Ring

Some have the custom that after the *chassan* gives the *kallah* the wedding ring, in return the *kallah* gives the *chassan* one. *Horav Moshe Feinstein zt"l*⁵⁵ maintains that this is a *goyisha* custom and it is forbidden. However, if after the *chupah* the *kallah* gives her husband a ring to wear as an adornment, to show they are married it is permitted, as long as the ring is not a symbol of *kiddushin* on her part. Nonetheless, many *poskim* say although it might be permitted, a *Yira Shomayim* should not wear a ring.⁵⁶

The Proper Place For The *Bimah*

The proper place for the *Bimah* is in middle of the *shul*.⁵⁷ One of the reasons for this is that the *goyim* have their lecterns in the front part of their churches, and if the *Bimah* would be in the front, it would seem that we are copying them.⁵⁸ Many *poskim* say it does not have to be exactly in the middle, but it should be far away from the *Aaron Kodesh* so that one may pass by the *Aaron Kodesh* and the *Bima*.⁵⁹

The *Bas-Mitzvah* Celebration

Many *poskim* maintain that one should not celebrate their becoming *Bas-Mitzvah* with a party since it is following the ways of the *goyim*, and there is no basis for this *seuda*.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, many *poskim* say those that have the custom to have a *Bas-Mitzvah* celebration, have on whom to rely upon.⁶¹ One may not have their

⁵⁰ *Chazzon Yeshaya* page 281.

⁵¹ *Yaskil Avdi E.H.* 6:1, *Yismach Lev* 1:page 82:122.

⁵² Refer to *Levushei Mordechai E.H.* 1:47, *Divrei Malkiel* 5:205, *Maharam Shik E.H.* 87, *Yehuda Yaleh* 1:38, *Chassan Sofer E.H.* 85, *Pri Hasadeh* 4:97, *Mishpatei Uziel E.H.* 60, *Yaskil Avdi E.H.* 7:10, *Yabea Omer E.H.* 3:10, *Teshuvos V'hanhugos* 2:648, *B'shvili Haparsha* pages 340-341.

⁵³ *E.H.* 1:93.

⁵⁴ It is permitted for a *mesader kedushin* to perform a *kiddushin* in a *shul* (*Igros Moshe* *ibid*). Nonetheless, a *chupah* should not be made in a *shul* for other reasons. (*Yalkut Yosef (Soveh Simchas)* 1:pages 90-91, *Yismach Lev* 1:page 83:124).

⁵⁵ *Igros Moshe E.H.* 3:18, 4:32:2, *Yalkut Yosef (Soveh Simchas)* 1:page 125, *Asei Lechu Rav* 5:page 386, *Shevet Ha'kehsui* 3:237. Refer to *Ran Mesechtas Shabbos* page 26a "v'al."

⁵⁶ *Igros Moshe* *ibid*.

⁵⁷ *Rambam Hilchos Tefilla* 11:3, *Kesef Mishnah, Rama O.C.* 150:5, *Levush* 5, *Maharam Shik Y.D.* 165, *Yehuda Yaleh* 1:3, *Levushei Mordechai O.C.* 2:86, *Ben Ish Chai Vayikra* 1:14, *Meishiv Dover O.C.* 1:15, *Shulchan Hatohar (Karmarna)* 150:3, *Aruch Ha'shulchan* 150:9, *Yaskil Avdi* 7:9, *Betzel Hachuchma* 2:69, *Minhag Yisroel Torah* 150:15, *Yalkut Yosef* 150:5:footnote 5, see *Mamer Mordechai* 50:3, *Kinyan Torah* 1:17. The *Serdei Eish* 1:15:page 4 says it is forbidden to daven in a *shul* that does not have the *bimah* in middle of the *shul*. Many *Sefardim* do not have the *bimah* in the middle and they have on whom to rely upon (*Halacha Berurah* 150:14).

⁵⁸ Refer to *Maharam Shik* *ibid*, *Biur Halacha* 150 "b'emtza." For additional reasons see *Chasam Sofer O.C.* 28, *Pri Hasadeh* 3:59, *Machaneh Chaim* 3:10.

⁵⁹ Refer to *Divrei Malkiel* 5:234:2, *Arugas Habosem O.C.* 29, *Aprikasisa D'Yanu* 1:76, *Noam* 7:pages 125-128, *Igros Moshe O.C.* 1:42, 2:41, refer to *Yalkut Yosef* 150:pages 222-223:footnote 5 if it is permitted to move a *bimah* that was in middle to a different place.

⁶⁰ *Igros Moshe O.C.* 1:104, 2:97, *Zekan Aaron* 1:6, *Serdei Eish* 2:39:26-32, *Be'er Moshe* 1:10:5, *Teshuvos V'hanhugos* 1:156, refer to *Minhag Yisroel Torah* 6:pages 108-110.

⁶¹ *Ben Ish Chai Re'eh* 1:17, *Kol Mevaser* 2:44, *Yaskil Avdi O.C.* 5:28, *Yechaveh Da'as* 2:29, *Yabea Omer* 6:29:4, *Yalkut Yosef* 225:20:page 607, see *Noam* 7:pages 54-55.

Bas-Mitzvah celebration in a *shul*.⁶² The *Bas-Mitzvah* celebration is not a *seudas mitzvah* according to many *poskim*.⁶³

Thanksgiving Celebrations

Horav Moshe Feinstein zt"l was hesitant to permit one to have a Thanksgiving celebration. However, if the reason why one is eating turkey is not because of Thanksgiving (but because it is readily available) then one may eat the turkey. Nonetheless, one who wants to act in a more stringent manner, should eat the turkey on a different night. One should preferably not schedule a *chasana* or a *Bar Mitzvah* on the night of Thanksgiving, since it might be *maris ayin*. However, making a *seuda* for a *Pidyon Haben* or a *Bris Milah* is permitted, since it is obvious that the *seuda* you are making is for *seudas mitzvah*. If one schedules a *chasana* etc. on Thanksgiving because many people are off from work that day, he may do so.⁶⁴ *Horav Yisroel Belsky Shlita* adds the following; “If such parties were made as a sign of patriotism to the U.S., it would be acceptable for *yidin* to make them as well as a sign of loyalty to their host country. This does not seem to be the case however, and there is no reason that a *yid* should make them.”

Placing Flowers/Pictures On A Gravestone

Some have the custom to place flowers etc. on the *aaron* of the deceased and/or on the gravestone. Many *poskim* are against this practice as this stems from the custom of the *goyim*.⁶⁵ Some say those who do so, have on what to rely on;⁶⁶ however, this is not the custom.⁶⁷ One is not allowed to place a picture of the deceased on the gravestone.⁶⁸

Sport Stadiums

*Horav Moshe Feinstein zt"l*⁶⁹ maintains that one who attends a sports stadium falls into the category of *moshev leitzim*. Although the *issur* of “following in the ways of the *goyim*” is not being transgressed, one is subjecting himself to a place where there is a lack of *tznius*.⁷⁰ If one does attend these sports events, he should be careful to act in accordance with *halacha*.

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⁶² *Igros Moshe O.C.* 1:104, *Serdei Eish* ibid, see *Hakotton H'hilchosuv* 83:page 169.

⁶³ *Igros Moshe O.C.* 4:36, *Halachos V'halichos Bar Mitzvah* 4:1.

⁶⁴ Refer to *Igros Moshe E.H.* 2:13:page 326, *O.C.* 5:20:6, *Y.D.* 4:11:4.

⁶⁵ Refer to *Bais Shearim Y.D.* 428, *Minchas Elazar* 4:61:3, *Serdei Eish* 2:108, *Yaskil Avid Y.D.* 4:25, *Teshuvos V'hanhugos* 1:714, *Kerem Shlomo Y.D.* 178:7:13, *Minchas Yitzchok* 1:31, *Natey Gavriel Aveilus* 1:page 204:8,

⁶⁶ *Yabea Omer* 3:24 in depth.

⁶⁷ Refer to footnote 65.

⁶⁸ *Chasam Sofer Lekutim* 6:4:page 2, *Maharam Shik Y.D.* 170:page 53, *Kol Mevaser* 1:14, *Minhag Yisroel Torah* 6:pages 96-97:2, *Shevet Ha'Levi* 7:137, *V'ein Lumo Michshal* 2:page 110:21, see *Yabea Omer Y.D.* 7:32.

⁶⁹ *Y.D.* 4:11:1, see *O.C.* 2:95, *Y.D.* 2:33.

⁷⁰ Refer to *Mesechtas Avodah Zara* 18b, *Chinuch Mitzvah* 262, *Yechaveh Da'as* 3:66, *Minchas Yitzchok* 6:145, *Minhag Yisroel Torah* 6:pages 69-72. In regard to saying “bye” when leaving someone refer to *Shulchan Aruch Hamikutzar* 44:footnote 23.