

## Teaching Torah to Non-Jews

Rabbi Shlomo Borenstein

### Introduction

With assimilation and inter-marriage on the upswing, and conversions often performed not according to the letter of the law, more and more non-Jews are making their way into the Jewish community.<sup>1</sup> Whether it be in day schools, youth groups, shuls, or even at our dinner tables, the problem of non-Jews blending in with *Klal Yisrael* is a growing one.

Aside from the many obvious problems that have thus been created, there are many other problematic situations of which the public may not be aware. One such is that of teaching our Torah to non-Jews. The Talmud, *Rishonim*, and *Acharonim* deal with this issue; their conclusions are

---

1. Although this is primarily a problem outside Eretz Yisrael, due to dramatic changes in the former Soviet Union, Eretz Yisrael is now feeling the impact of a new crisis. With the floodgates open for immigration from the former Soviet Union, investigations have found that large numbers of new immigrants are not halachically Jewish. It is a growing problem which the *poskim* there are going to have to deal with.

---

Member of Lakewood Kolel, Jerusalem,  
and Yeshiva Torah Or.

the topic of this article. Our interest herein is not to discuss the question of "Who is a Jew", but rather to examine the problem after that question has already been resolved.

This article should not be used to render a *psak* on any cases whatsoever; only a competent halachic authority is qualified to make the final ruling.

### The Prohibition for a Non-Jew to Learn Torah

The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* reads:

ואמר ר' יוחנן עובד כוכבים שעוסק בתורה חייב מיתה שנאמר תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה לנו מורשה ולא להם.

Rabbi Yochanon said "A non-Jew who learns Torah is deserving of death, for the verse reads 'Moshe commanded the Torah to us, as an inheritance.' For us an inheritance and not for them."<sup>2</sup>

---

2. The Gemara explains: If the word *מורשה* is read as written (*morashah*), it means the Torah was given to us as an inheritance; the use of it by a non-Jew is then considered גזילה, theft. If the word *מורשה* is not read as written but rather as *מאורסה* (*me'orasah*), it means the Torah is like a betrothed bride to us, and a non-Jew taking it is like one who takes another's bride, which is among the prohibited relations even for a non-Jew.

The *Turei Even* in *Chagiga* 13 introduces a novel idea which warrants mentioning. If the reason is because the Torah is like a betrothed bride to *Klal Yisrael*, there is no *heter* for a non-Jew to learn Torah, as it would be like his taking another's bride. However, if the problem is that the Torah is an inheritance, and a non-Jew learning it is "stealing," then if the teacher doesn't mind the non-Jew's "taking" the Torah, there would be no problem of theft. Although there may still be a problem of "לא עשה כן" for the teacher, the *issur* of לפני עור would not apply. And, for the non-Jew, not only the Seven Mitzvot would be allowed but perhaps the rest of the Torah would also be permitted. See *Ein Yaakov* in *Sanhedrin*, who follows the *Turei Even*.

The Gemara then cites a seeming contradiction:

ר"מ אומר מניין שאפילו עובד כוכבים ועוסק בתורה שהוא ככהן גדול  
שנאמר וכו'.

Rabbi Meir says, "From where do we know that even a non-Jew who learns Torah is like the High Priest? As it is written. . . etc."

The Gemara resolves this contradiction by explaining that when Rabbi Meir uses the term "Torah" in this context,

---

The commentary *Ahavat Eitan* on *Ein Yaakov*, however, objects to this explanation of *Turei Even*. He maintains that the two opinions in *Sanhedrin* are not arguing at all. The opinion which considers a non-Jew's learning Torah to be stealing is referring specifically to *Torah Sheb'al Peh* (oral tradition). The other opinion, which states it is a problem of taking a bride, refers to *Torah Shebiktav* (written Torah). Since the problem of stealing is referring only to that part of the Torah which is transmitted orally, there is a much greater fear of the non-Jews' claiming the Torah was given to them as well. We have nothing in our hands to prove differently. Therefore, says the *Ahavat Eitan*, certainly it is prohibited to teach a non-Jew *Torah Sheb'al Peh*, unlike the *Turei Even's* opinion.

R. Moshe Feinstein, (אגרות משה י"ד חלק ג' סי' צ) asks a more basic question on the *Turei Even*. The "inheritance" was not given to any one individual. It was given to *Klal Yisrael* as a whole. Even if one person doesn't mind the non-Jew's taking the Torah, how does he have a right to give away the inheritance of everyone else? He concludes that "further investigation" is needed.

The *Sefat Emet*, in *Chagiga* 13, adds a very important part. The *Turei Even* brings proof for his opinion by showing that *Chazal* quite often answer non-Jews with *pesukim* and other *divrei Torah*. Obviously, then, there is no problem of teaching them if we don't mind. The *Sefat Emet* refutes this by saying that when the non-Jews misunderstand the meaning of a *pasuk* or a different part of the Torah and therefore accuse us of being incorrect, we have a right to answer them with whatever information we need to clear up the matter. Defending ourselves and our Torah is not the same as going out and teaching it.

*Seridei Eish* (סימן צב, חלק ב'), does not accept this.

he is referring to the Seven Mitzvot that a non-Jew is commanded. From this explanation we may infer that the Talmud agrees that the Torah was given specifically to the Jewish people, to the exclusion of other nations. Their attempt to learn Torah is an act deserving death.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the Rambam<sup>4</sup> records the law:

עבד"ם שעסק בתורה חייב מיתה לא יעסוק אלא בשבע מצוות שלהן בלבד . . . ומודיעין אותו שהוא חייב מיתה על זה אבל אינו נהרג.

A non-Jew who studied Torah is deserving death. He should study only their Seven Mitzvot. . . And we make known to him that he is deserving death — however he is not put to death [by a court].<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of the actuality that he is not put to death, the offence of a non-Jew's learning Torah (other than the Seven Mitzvot) is of the greatest severity and, according to the Rambam, requires us to warn him of his transgression.

The question which needs to be asked is, why did *Chazal* find it so terrible for a non-Jew to learn Torah? Wouldn't learning it make them better people? Wouldn't it foster a better understanding of what a Jew stands for and is striving to attain?

---

3. עיין רשב"א ב"ק לח. ד"ה אפילו גוי.

4. הלכות מלכים פרק י' הלכה ט.

5. The *Lechem Mishneh* explains the Rambam differently. The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* 59 states that there is nothing that a Jew is permitted to have which is not permitted to a non-Jew. Thus, argues the *Lechem Mishneh*, something that is a mitzvah for a Jew, cannot be forbidden for a non-Jew. Consequently the Rambam comes to teach that it is the Rabbis, and not the Torah, who decreed the death penalty for a non-Jew's learning Torah. Although it is an offence warranting death, the courts cannot execute it.

The Meiri<sup>6</sup> explains the danger which the Sages anticipated and tried to prevent: If a non-Jew were to learn Torah, not in order to convert and observe the mitzvot, but rather just to obtain knowledge and gain ideas, Jews might mistakenly assume this person is Jewish. They might follow him and be led astray by his example and teachings. In order to protect *Klal Yisrael* from this potential calamity, non-Jews were prohibited from learning Torah.<sup>7</sup>

### The Prohibition of Teaching Torah To A Non-Jew

In *Chagiga* 13a the Talmud states:

6. סנהדרין נט.

7. The *Seridei Eish* seems to disagree with the reasoning of the Meiri. The prohibition of teaching Torah to a slave is because he might begin to act like a free Jew and come to marry a free Jewish girl. This fear is realistic only with respect to a slave, who is already observing the mitzvot that a woman must observe. A non-Jew, however, who is not engaged in mitzvot, would not be able to pass himself off as a Jew.

*Ahavat Eitan*, *ibid*, writes that a non-Jew's learning Oral Torah involves a greater problem of theft because through his learning, people might come to say that the Torah was given to them also.

The *Besamim Rosh*, Responsum #327, explains differently than the Meiri. It is a severe prohibition, he claims, to give away that which makes us holy and unique and which separates us from the other nations of the world. The Torah is the heart of our people and to give it to others will take away our uniqueness. Rav Ovadia Yosef, (*Yabia Omer* 2 *Yoreh Deah* #7) cites a text in *Sotah* 35b, stating that non-Jews had an opportunity to nullify the prohibition. When the Jews crossed the Jordan and came to Mount Eival, they wrote out the entire Torah on stones in order to give the other nations a chance to read and accept it. This was a special time in which no prohibition existed for them to learn the Torah. Because they didn't learn the Torah then, the previous prohibition of a non-Jew's learning Torah was reinstated and, so too, the prohibition to teach them.

ואמר רב אמי אין מוסרין דברי תורה לעובד כוכבים שנאמר לא עשה כן לכל גוי ומשפטיו כל ידעום

Rav Ami said "Do not give over the words of the Torah to a non-Jew, as it is written: 'He did not do so to any other nations and his laws they were not informed.'"

Tosafot question why the Gemara needed to cite a verse as the source for the transgression of teaching Torah to non-Jews. Since the Gemara itself in *Sanhedrin* teaches that a non-Jew is liable for death if he studies Torah, the text here should say that the prohibition involved in teaching is *לפני עור*, "placing a stumbling block" in front of someone — one may not cause anyone to sin, even a non-Jew. Tosafot answer that in the case in point there is another non-Jew ready to teach this person if the Jew won't. Since it is possible for the non-Jew to transgress (learn Torah) without the Jew's help, there is no problem here of *לפני עור*. The Gemara consequently informs us that there is nevertheless another *issur* based on the verse cited.

Thus from Tosafot we see clearly that it is forbidden to teach Torah to non-Jews: because of *לפני עור*<sup>8</sup> if he cannot

8. עין בתוס' ר"ד ב"ק לח. which concurs with Tosafot.

Whether the prohibition of *לפני עור* applies here is of considerable debate. The *Seridei Eish* and *Maasei Ish*, Y.D. Responsum #7, claim that since there are many non-Jews today who read, speak, and understand Hebrew, and since the entire Old Testament has been translated into many different languages, it is possible for non-Jews to learn Torah without our help; therefore, no prohibition of *לפני עור* exists.

The *Besamim Rosh* argues that the fact that non-Jews need to come to Jews to learn Torah is an indication that their other opportunities are not sufficient for them to understand it. Consequently, it is certainly *לפני עור* to teach them.

The *Sedei Chemed*, (מערכת האל"ף כללים ק"ב) adds from *Yad Eliyahu*

learn it through other means, or because of *לא עשה כן* if he can acquire this knowledge from other sources.<sup>9</sup>

Yet another text in *Bava Kama* seems to pose a problem. There it says that the Roman government sent two officials to the Jews, to have them learn the Torah. The Jews taught them until they had gone through all the Torah three times! If it is forbidden to teach Torah to non-Jews Torah, how could they teach these two Romans? One explanation is that the two came posing as Jews. Since there was no reason to assume they weren't Jewish, they were taught the Torah. Tosafot suggest two other possibilities: Even if it was known that the two were not Jewish, it could be that since the government decreed it, the Jews were required to obey. The prohibition of teaching is not so severe that a Jew must die for it.

Tosafot offer a second explanation: Possibly, the two officials converted and thus there would certainly be no problem in teaching them.<sup>10</sup> *Yam Shel Shlomo*<sup>11</sup> comments

---

#48, that even if they can find other sources from which to learn, there still exists a rabbinic prohibition. In מערכת הוי"ו אות כ"ז סק"ג In *Sdei Chemed* writes there may be a problem of assisting someone in doing a prohibition.

9. Tosafot in *Bava Kamma* 38a קראו ד"ה write that one who teaches Torah to a non-Jew violates a positive commandment, based on the Gemara in *Chagiga*. The מהר"ץ חיות points out that the Gemara does not use this term but rather says "אין מוסרין" (we do not give over). It is interesting to note that Tosafot choose the *pasuk* "מגיד דבריו ליעקב" and say it is a violation of a positive mitzvah, and do not mention the *pasuk* brought in the Gemara, *לא עשה כן*, and say it is violation of a negative command. See *Ein Yaakov*.

10. עיין שו"ת באר שבע חלק באר מים חיים סי' יד'.

11. The *Yam Shel Shlomo* learns very important points from Tosafot's first answer. Since the Jews knew that these two men

that we may infer that since they felt constrained to offer another answer, Tosafot felt that the first answer wasn't sufficient. Maybe it is forbidden to teach Torah to non-Jews even at the expense of keeping peace with the government. Furthermore, he adds, it is certainly forbidden merely for the sake of additional revenue.

Teaching non-Jews is not a one-time sin. It has far-reaching repercussions which not only do not promote peace and *Kiddush Hashem*, but may even lead to heresy and *Chilul Hashem*.

Nevertheless, there may be times when it is permitted to teach Torah to non-Jews. The *Seridei Eish*<sup>12</sup> (citing Ramo, *Y. D.* 291:2,) says it is permissible to give a *mezuzah* to a non-Jew if one is afraid what he may do if one doesn't. Although not all mitzvot are equal in this regard, we see that Judaism is concerned about arousing the anger of non-Jews by the performance of mitzvot.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the talmudic texts we have cited, and the rabbinic discussions thereon, none of the *poskim*, including the Rambam and the *Shulchan Aruch*, list teaching Torah to non-Jews as a transgression.<sup>14</sup>

---

were non-Jews sent by the government, why did they tell them the truth about the Torah and halacha?

12. Citing Ramo, *Y. D.* 291:2.

13. The *Besamim Rosh* agrees with this idea of not arousing anger, especially when one's job deals with these matters. The *Yad Eliyahu* and *Yabia Omer* add that it is permissible to answer questions to avoid a *Chilul Hashem* or to create a *Kiddush Hashem*. The *Yabia Omer* puts this in the category of "knowing what to answer *apikorsim*."

14. The *Be'er Sheva*, *ibid.*, is bothered by this omission and suggests that perhaps the talmudic discussions are not the final halacha. After a short discussion on the matter, he cites the

### The Extent of the Prohibition

Rav Ovadia Yosef was asked if it makes any difference if the non-Jew is a child.<sup>15</sup>

He concluded that a child who really doesn't comprehend what he is being taught or from where it comes, may be taught Torah.

As we have noted, a non-Jew who learns the Seven Mitzvot that were commanded to him is considered like the High Priest.<sup>16</sup> Tosafot in *Chagiga* write that although it is forbidden to teach them other parts of the Torah, it is a mitzvah to teach them the Seven Mitzvot. Since every individual is obligated to learn that part of the Torah which pertains to him, we do have a mitzvah to teach them their

---

Talmud in *Shabbat* 87 and *Yevamot* 62 which says that Moshe Rabbeinu did three things on his own that Hashem approved. One of the three was to break the tablets when he saw the Jews worshipping the Golden Calf. Since they were acting like non-Jews, they were not fit to receive the Torah. Based on this, the *Be'er Sheva* writes, one who is careful should refrain from teaching Torah to a non-Jew.

*Yad Eliyahu* claims that really there is no omission of this law in the Codes. The Rambam, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 3:1, and the *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 246:7 bring the halacha that a teacher should not teach a student who is not "worthy." *Yad Eliyahu* maintains that certainly this means one should not teach a non-Jew.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Iggerot Moshe, Y. D.* III 89) answers similarly, citing the Rambam, *Hilchot Avodim* 8:18 and the *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 267:71, that it is prohibited to teach a slave Torah. See also *Minchat Chinuch*, mitzvah 232, #3.

15. *Yabia Omer*.

16. The reward a non-Jew receives for his learning is discussed in *Bava Kama* 38a, which concludes that although a non-Jew is compared to the High Priest if he learns, he receives only the reward of "one who is not commanded and performs." This is a lesser reward than "one who is commanded and performs."

obligations.<sup>17 18</sup>

The *Yabia Omer*, citing *Yaffe Lelev* offers reasons why it might be prohibited to teach even the Seven Mitzvot to non-Jews. But he concludes that since through observance of these precepts, society is improved and the world becomes a better place in which to live, it is permissible to teach these laws to non-Jews.

Rav Yosef also rules that since it is forbidden for non-Jews to transgress these mitzvot, it cannot be forbidden for us to teach them.

The author of *Dvar Moshe* addresses the issue similarly. In Jewish law, women have no obligation to learn Torah, and one is discouraged from teaching them. However, women are obligated to learn those laws which apply to them. This learning doesn't fall under the mitzvah of "learning Torah" but is rather part of the obligation of

---

17. The *Be'er Sheva* (loc. cit.) writes that the prohibition of a non-Jew's learning refers only to the Torah and its mitzvot which *Klal Yisrael* were commanded, but does not include the Prophets and Writings. These discuss the vengeance Hashem takes for the sake of *Klal Yisrael* and also gives appropriate teachings for those who deny the Torah.

18. In the *Sefer Ein Yaakov* on *Chagiga*, Tosafot and their question are cited, but another answer is given which does not appear in our texts. Tosafot state that it was a mitzvah to teach non-Jews the Seven Mitzvot only before the Torah was given at Sinai. After Sinai, however, we learn from the *pasuk* brought in the Gemara that it is forbidden to teach even the Seven Mitzvot. See פט פט חלק ג' סי' פט who does not have this version in Tosafot.

The *Yad Eliezer* brings an opinion, and the *Divrei Yissachar* also writes, that although if a non-Jew learns and keeps the Seven Mitzvot, he is considered to be like the High Priest, it is still prohibited to teach him these mitzvot.

fulfilling the mitzvot. So, too, a non-Jew needs to learn those mitzvot which apply to him; therefore, there is no prohibition to teach him.<sup>19</sup>

But what it is that can be taught is not so clearcut. The Maharsha<sup>20</sup> limits the teaching to the basic law themselves — what may or what may not be done. An individual teaching these laws would have to make it clear from the start that only questions regarding the actual performance of the mitzvot will be explained. Questions of “why” or “from where do we know” would have to be discouraged.<sup>21</sup>

Not all the *Rishonim* are this stringent. The Rambam seems to hold that the only prohibition for non-Jews is to learn as if the very learning is itself a mitzvah, but just to give him the knowledge and wisdom of the Torah in a casual fashion would be permissible.<sup>22 23</sup>

The Meiri seems to be even more lenient than the Rambam. He begins by saying that only “סתרי תורה”, the hidden secrets or reasons of the Torah, are forbidden to teach to non-Jews. He then goes on to define the “non-Jews” whom

---

19. Rav Yosef also uses such a reasoning citing the *Sefer Chasidim*, 313.

20. *Chagiga* 13.

21. It should be noted that there are opinions (and some say even in the Maharsha himself) that the reasons of the Seven Mitzvot and a thorough investigation of these mitzvot would be permissible. A competent Rav should be consulted.

22. See *Sedei Chemed* who learns from a Responsum of the Rambam that only the Seven Mitzvot are permissible for him to learn and for the Jew to teach.

23. The N'tziv in his *Meromei Sadeh* on *Chagiga* writes that the *issur* on the non-Jew is only if he learns it “בעינין”, in great depth. The *Seridei Eish* cites a *Taz*, O. C. 47:1 that supports the N'tziv's opinion. The *Machaneh Chaim* also agrees with the N'tziv.

the Gemara includes in the ban as only those people who are idolatrous and deny the basic belief in the existence of Hashem. To such a person, one may not teach Torah. This definition of “non-Jew”, if accepted, has very broad implications, and in today's world, it is very possible that according to the Meiri there would be no problem of teaching Torah to a typical non-Jew.

### The Written Torah

Although all seem to agree that one may not teach the Oral Law to a non-Jew, the question of the written Torah is subject to debate.

The MaHaRatz Chiut writes that *poskim* differentiate between teaching Oral Law, which is forbidden, and the written law, which is permissible to teach.<sup>24</sup>

But *Sedei Chemed* is at a loss as to who these *poskim* are. He lists many who disagree with the MaHaRatz Chiut, and one of them is the *Shiltei HaGiborim* (first *perek* of *Avoda Zora*), who says one may teach the Prophets and Writings to non-Jews in order to show them the salvations the Jews have had and in order to answer the questions of those who deny Hashem. But only the Prophets and Writings are permissible, nothing else.

The *Yabia Omer* also doesn't know who these *poskim* of the MaHaRatz Chiut are, and claims that it is certainly forbidden to teach Torah, both written and Oral.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the strong objection to the MaHaRatz Chiut, there

---

24. סוטה לה; חגיגה יג, שו"ת סי' לב. The MaHaRatz Chiut cites the *Shita Mekubetset* in *Ketubot* 21A as also holding this opinion.

25. Other opinions who hold *Torah Shebiktav* follows under the prohibition include *Be'er Sheva* and *VaYomer Yitzchak*.

are a number of opinions who side with him. The *Seridei Eish* mentions the view of Rabbenu Gershom in *Baba Batra* 21b which appears to permit teaching the Oral Law. R. Y. Emden,<sup>26</sup> the N'tziv,<sup>27</sup> and the *Responsa Yehuda Yaale* also concur with the MaHaRatz Chiut. The N'tziv reasons that since Hashem commanded Joshua to write the Torah into seventy languages it must be permissible to teach it. *Yehuda Yaale* has a different proof. The Gemara states it is prohibited for a non-Jew to "delve" ("עוסק") in Torah. It is only through the Oral Law that one can "delve". Therefore, study of the written Torah must be permissible.

### Converts

May one teach Torah to a person who is interested in converting to Judaism? Although this person may have the best intentions, the fact remains that he or she is still not Jewish. This question has aroused debate, beginning with an argument between the Maharsha and Rabbi Akiva Eiger.

The Gemara<sup>28</sup> tells about a non-Jew who came to Hillel to convert, with one provision — he would convert only if he could be the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest), which is, of course, impossible. Nevertheless, Hillel taught him Torah until the man himself realized he could never become *Kohen Gadol*. From here the Maharsha learns that when someone comes to convert, it is permissible to teach him Torah even before he becomes Jewish.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger,<sup>29</sup> however, cites Tosafot who, in two

26. הגהת יעב"ץ סנהדרין.

27. מרומי שדה, חגיגה, משיב דבר ח"ש סי' ע"ז.

28. שבת לא.

29. שו"ת רעק"א סי' מ"א.

different places, ask how Hillel could have done what he did. Tosafot (*Yevamot*) answer that Hillel was confident the non-Jew would ultimately accept his conversion לשם שמים, with no ulterior purpose. Rabbi Akiva Eiger explains that Hillel converted him immediately and thereafter taught him Torah. Consequently, we cannot adduce any proof from the Gemara. His conclusion is that one may not teach Torah to a non-Jew before his conversion.

In support of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, *Yabia Omer* notes that at various times gentiles came to Hillel to convert and he converted them. First came the conversion, and then the various problems were taken care of. For his part, the Maharsha counters by saying that the Gemara doesn't really mean he converted but rather that, as soon as he was ready to convert, it became permissible to teach him Torah.

In *Yevamot*<sup>30</sup> the Gemara states that when a potential convert comes, one should make known to him a "few of the lighter mitzvot and a few of the more severe ones." It seems clear from here that we must teach him some Torah before he converts. The *Shulchan Aruch*<sup>31</sup> brings this as the halacha. This is in direct negation to the position of R. Akiva Eiger.

*Yabia Omer* answers by saying that this is not the same as teaching Torah. There is no other way to determine if a person is sincere in his conversion if he doesn't know what is involved. Perhaps once he hears about how many mitzvot there are and what goes into them, he will reconsider. Thus, it is a necessary part of the conversion process to inform him of Torah requirements.<sup>32</sup>

30. מו:.

31. יו"ד רס"ח ס' ב.

32. The *Machane Chaim* (Y. D. 45) answers a little differently

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein<sup>33</sup> explains the whole disagreement between the Maharsha and Rabbi Akiva Eiger in a different manner. He writes that even R. Akiva Eiger would agree with the Maharsha to teach Torah to a non-Jew before conversion. That is how we determine if he is sincere or not. What then is the argument? What if the country has a law against converting to Judaism? The only way to convert would be to travel to another country, and the gentile would never be able to return to his homeland. May one teach Torah to such a person, knowing that under such circumstances he might very well change his mind? In such a case, Rabbi Akiva Eiger held one could not teach him, but the Maharsha would permit it. If Hillel could teach the non-Jew even though he might change his mind when he found out he couldn't be the *Kohen Gadol*, then it is permissible to teach a person even though he might change his mind for other reasons.<sup>34</sup>

It seems clear from Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and Rabbi Ovadia Yosef<sup>35</sup> that to teach a non-Jew a few of the mitzvot, as the *Shulchan Aruch* prescribes, is no problem. For more than those few mitzvot, however, further investigation is

---

than the *Yabia Omer*. Since the *Bet Din* is making these mitzvot known to him against his will, he is not held responsible for learning them. If he is not held responsible for learning them, then *Bet Din* is not transgressing לפני עור.

33. אגרות משה י"ד ח"ג ס' צ.

34. On this question, the *Kuntrus Zichron LeRishon* holds if the potential convert will have to wait a long time to convert, it is not permitted to teach him Torah because in truth he is still a gentile. The *Tzemach Tzedek* (Y. D. 200) is even more stringent, making learning Torah dependent on having a *bris*. From the text in *Yevamot*, we assume he means that he must be ready for the *bris* immediately.

35. See the proof he brings for the Maharsha from the Meiri.

needed. Also, according to Rabbi Feinstein there is a reasonable doubt that the person might change his mind because of outside influences after learning the mitzvot. It is questionable if it is permitted.

### Selling or Handing out *Sefarim*

An interesting question was posed to Rav Ovadia Yosef. The rabbinate of Cairo handed out booklets to prospective converts telling them about Judaism and some mitzvot. Is this permissible? As we mentioned, there is no problem in *telling* converts about some of the mitzvot in order to determine their sincerity. But what about actually *handing* something to them?

The language in the Gemara is "אין מוסרין," "do not give over Torah to a non-Jew." From here the *Ein Yaakov*<sup>36</sup> learns that although one may teach the Seven Mitzvot to a non-Jew, one may not give him anything written. All the letters of our Torah are names of God and have holiness in them. They do not belong in the hands of non-Jews.<sup>37</sup>

The MaHaRatz Chiut<sup>38</sup> argues that the only problem with a non-Jew is teaching him. There is no problem with selling him *sefarim*, and it is not לפני עור. Rav Ovadia Yosef concludes that the rabbinate has sources to rely on, and it is a good custom; therefore, they may continue. Whether Rav Ovadia Yosef would extend this to other cases of teaching converts is not certain.

Another question is whether the ban, if it exists, applies

---

36. חגיגה יג.

37. י"ד רמ"ו ס"ו ו.

38. Rashi, "מלכים ב' כ: י"ג וישמע עליהם חזקיהו...", seems to forbid even showing a *Sefer Torah* to a non-Jew.



to books about Judaism printed in other languages. Although it seems from the *Ein Yaakov* that the problem is just if the *sefer* is in Hebrew, from Rav Yosef's case we see he understood that it may be a problem in any language. (The booklets in that case were in Arabic).

### Non-Jews who Listen in

As noted earlier, due to an increase in inter-marriage and an alarming number of conversions being performed not according to halacha, non-Jews are no longer uncommon in Jewish communities. It is not a rarity to find a family where one child is learning in Yeshiva and siblings are married out of the religion.

R. Moshe Feinstein<sup>39</sup> was asked to rule in the following case: A young man was returning home from yeshiva for Pesach, where he would recite the Haggada and explain it to his parents and relatives. At the seder, however, would be one relative with his non-Jewish wife. Should he be concerned with teaching Torah to non-Jew in such a circumstance?

R. Moshe Feinstein answers that when the Gemara said it is forbidden to give over Torah to non-Jews, it is referring to one who directs his teaching specifically to the non-Jew. If, however, his intent is to teach other Jews, and the non-Jew is among those present, certainly there is no problem. The prohibition of placing a stumbling block in front of someone applies when one places it in front of the blind person. But if the person does it on his own, there is no prohibition. (Here the woman doesn't have to come at all, and even when there she doesn't have to listen.)

39. שו"ת מהר"ץ חיות סי' לב.

A similar case may occur if a group of non-Jews wish to visit a synagogue on Shabbat to observe the services. May the Rav give his sermon with the non-Jews present? It seems from R. Moshe Feinstein's Responsum that since the Rav is directing his sermon to his congregants, and the spectators are coming of their own volition, there would be no problem involved. However, actually to invite a non-Jew to come to the sermon (or to the seder as in the previous case) may pose a problem and, therefore, a competent authority should be consulted.

### Non-Jews in Day Schools.

A more difficult question arose<sup>40</sup> regarding a Jewish day school that had a number of children enrolled who were not actually Jewish. Because of various members on the school board, and because of the financial situation of the school, it was impossible for these children to be asked to leave. Would a teacher, whose entire livelihood is dependent on his teaching at this institution, need to give up his job?

R. Moshe Feinstein tries to find leniencies to allow the teachers to keep their jobs. He writes that it is difficult for him to give a definitive *psak* on a matter which involves people's livelihood, when the matter is not mentioned among the *poskim* and thus the finer points are not known to us. It could be, he says, that since these children think they are Jewish and are going to the school in order to learn about Judaism, there is no *issur* involved. Also, since the teachers are primarily teaching the other children and these children are only listening, perhaps that too makes it as if we are not teaching them. Furthermore, it could be that the problem of a stumbling block doesn't apply in this case.

40. אגרות משה יו"ד חלק ב' סי' קלב.

because they are children. Also, the Gemara which says a non-Jew should not learn Torah may not be referring to a teacher and his students. Therefore, he is unwilling to instruct the teachers to leave their jobs, even though it may be the proper thing to do.<sup>41</sup>

It should be noted that R. Moshe Feinstein was replying to a case where the teachers were already employed by the school. For a person who is still looking for a teaching position, the ruling might be different. In each case, a competent rav should be consulted.

Other questions on this subject which need further investigation include: What is one allowed to answer to inquisitive neighbors? Is there a problem of "placing a stumbling block" to have a *sefer* published in English by a non-Jewish publishing firm? Can the Jewish viewpoint on issues of medicine, law, ethics, etc. be presented and explained at non-Jewish symposiums?

## Conclusion

The purpose of this article is not to offer legal rulings, but to make the reader aware of a problem which is becoming more common every day. Intentions of creating peace between the Jewish community and its non-Jewish neighbors, and of teaching mankind its biblical obligations are most noble and praiseworthy, but must be carried out within the framework of halacha. Our holy Torah was given to us to learn and live, and advice should be sought before transmitting any of it to those to whom the Torah was not given.

---

41. אגרות משה אה"ע חלק ד' סי' כו.