

## Ancient Egyptian Anti-Semitism

and

### Eight Differences between Pat Akum and Bishul Akum

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The Torah portion of Miketz recounts how Yosef made a meal for his brothers when they brought Binyamin to him. In the context of that meal, the Torah mentions that the Egyptian people would not eat with them, as it says ([Gen. 43:32](#)), “And they set for him (Yosef) separately and for them (his brothers) separately and for the Egyptians who ate with him separately because the Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews as it is an abomination to the Egyptians.”

There are various opinions as to why the Egyptians would not eat with the Jewish people.

#### **Eating a God**

Rashi says that the Egyptians considered it abhorrent to eat with the Jewish people because the Jews ate sheep which were viewed as a god by the Egyptian people. (See, for example, [here](#).) The Radak holds that, because the Egyptians worshipped sheep, they refrained from eating any meat. The Jews, however, ate meat at that meal, as it says (*ibid* [43:16](#)) that Yosef ordered, “Butcher an animal and prepare it.”

On a slightly different note, some point out that Yosef, being familiar with the Egyptian customs, would not have served food that was offensive to them at a meal that they would be attending. It therefore seems likely that there was a rule in ancient Egypt that Egyptians could not dine with people who consumed their god, the lamb, regardless of what was on the menu.

#### **Arrogant Egyptians**

The Chizkuni and Rashbam say that the Egyptians were a haughty people who looked down on other nations and considered them to belong to a lower class. They therefore refused to eat with non-Egyptians as they considered such eating to be an “abomination,” i.e., despicable. In contrast to Rashi’s opinion about the sheep, the Rashbam writes that the Egyptians considered sheep to be disgusting. This explains why they looked down at shepherds, as the verse says ([Gen. 46:32](#)), “Because shepherds were considered abominable to all Egyptians.”

Many years later Moshe told Pharaoh that the Jewish people could not sacrifice sheep while in the land of Egypt, as the verse ([Exodus 8:22](#)) says, “if we sacrifice the abomination of Egypt in front of their eyes, will they not stone us?” He meant that the Egyptians considered the sheep to be an unworthy sacrifice and would be so disgusted by the Jews offering this sacrifice that they might stone them. We find stoning to be an expression of scorn when Shimi, son of Gera, threw stones at King David when the latter was fleeing Jerusalem (see [Shmuel II 16:6](#)).

### **Contempt for the Hebrews**

Ramban points out, on several occasions, how the verses indicate the strong aversion that the Egyptians had for the Jewish people.

- When the wife of Potiphar told her husband how Yosef (supposedly) tried to assault her she prefaced her words by saying ([Gen. 39:17](#)) “The Hebrew slave whom you brought *into our house* came to me...” What she meant was that Hebrew slaves were so contemptible that they didn’t belong in the house. And that, as such, Yosef should have been housed in a separate quarter for slaves rather than dwelling under the same roof as them.
- When the butler was describing Yosef to Pharaoh, he said ([Gen:41:12](#)) that he was a “young Hebrew slave.” The butler was trying to ensure that Yosef would not be elevated to a high position by pointing out that he was from a hated people.
- Before elevating Yosef to the position of prime minister, Pharaoh said to his advisors ([Gen. 41:38](#)), “Can a man be found like this who has the spirit of G-d in him?” The reason Pharaoh said that is because he was trying to get the approval of his advisors for his choice for prime minister. It would be a highly unusual move to appoint a Jew to this position since the Egyptians held the Jews in contempt. He therefore pointed out to them that he needed to make an exception in this case, as there was no one else comparable to Yosef at that time.

### **Staying Separate**

Our sages say that the Jewish people maintained their identity in Egypt by keeping their own language, names, and style of dress. (The list in our Midrash [[Vayikrah Rabbah 32:5](#)] is slightly different. But see [here](#) that the above list is found in many early sources.)

It is also possible that the Egyptians' refusal to dine with the Jewish people was a factor in the Jewish people's lack of assimilation. According to our sages, social dining can be a major cause of intermarriage. For this reason the sages restricted the eating of food cooked by non-Jews and, to a lesser degree, bread baked by non-Jews (*bishul akum* and *pat akum* respectively, see below).

It is even possible that G-d arranged for the Jewish people to be exiled to the land of Egypt rather than to another nearby country so that the locals would not socialize with them. This would assist them in maintaining their identity as a people.

The rest of this article will focus on the differences between the laws of *bishul akum* (foods cooked by a gentile) and *pat akum* (bread baked by a gentile). It is based on sections 112 and 113 in *Yoreh De'ah* with the commentaries, the *Chelkat Binyamin* (by Rabbi Binyamin Cohen) on those sections, and the book *Pas Yisroel* and *Bishul Yisroel* by Rabbi Dovid Cohen (self-published in 2017).

## **Eight Differences**

Both the rules of *bishul akum* and *pat akum* are Rabbinic safeguards to protect against intermarriage. Nevertheless there are several differences between these Rabbinic enactments. Eight of them are listed below.

### **1) Origin**

Several of the commentaries say that these decrees were made at different times.

- The Ramban (on *Avodah Zarah* 35b) says that the sages originally decreed against the bread of gentiles since bread is a staple of life which is eaten constantly. The sages therefore felt that forbidding gentile bread would be sufficient to minimize the social interaction between Jews and non-Jews. Later the sages made an additional decree against eating food cooked by gentiles which is based on an additional reason (see below).
- Rabeinu Tam (quoted in [Tosfot D.H. Vehshelakot Avodah Zarah 37b](#)) is of the opinion that the reverse was true. Originally the rabbis only decreed against cooked foods as they felt that if Jews and non-Jews partook of cooked meals together, it would most likely lead to increased social interaction. Eating bread together, however, would not have such an impact since bread is considered a basic necessity and is not as fancy as cooked foods. Later, during the time of Hillel and Shammai, the rabbis felt that it was necessary to make an additional rule against non-Jewish bread (*pat akum*).

### **2) Reason for the Prohibition - Intermarriage or Kashrut**

Although everyone agrees that the reason the sages forbade *pat akum* is that it might lead to (social interaction which can lead to) intermarriage, some say that they forbade *bishul akum* for an additional reason. Specifically, Rashi ([Avodah Zarah 38a D.H. MiDeRabanan](#)) writes that the rabbis forbade it as otherwise one might become accustomed to eating food cooked by gentiles which might lead to eating nonkosher food. (Bread, on the other hand, is a simpler food which was generally made with only kosher ingredients.) The Aruch Hashulchan ([113:2](#)) points out that Rashi writes elsewhere ([Avodah Zarah 35b D.H. Vehashlakot](#)) that the reason for the decree against *bishul akum* is to prevent intermarriage. As such, it is clear that Rashi holds that the sages had both reasons in mind when they made the decree, the kashrut issue and the intermarriage issue. This explains (according to Rashi's opinion) as to why the rules of *bishul akum* are stricter than those for *pat akum* as the additional reason for *bishul akum* (not coming to eat unkosher food) is a cause for additional strictness.

### 3) Repealed or Not?

Some say ([Tosfot D.H. Michlal on Avodah Zarah 35b](#)) that the decree against *pat akum* was repealed by the sages when they realized that it was too difficult to keep as bread is a staple of life and Jewish-baked bread is not always available.

Others say (Mordechai Avodah Zarah ot 830, based on Jerusalem Talmud Avodah Zarah 15a and b) that the decree was partially repealed in that the later sages permitted the consumption of *pat palter* (bread of a non-Jewish baker, see below). [According to Rabbi Yosef Karro, this leniency only applies where no Jewish bread is available whereas according to the Rama this leniency applies in all situations (see [Y.D. 112:2](#)).]

### 4) Baker's Bread Permitted but Not a Caterer's Food

The halacha states that, under certain circumstances, one may eat the (kosher) bread baked by a gentile baker in a commercial setting, as eating this bread will not lead to any social interaction. This is called *pat palter*, bread of a baker. It is unlike bread baked by a private citizen which is usually shared by only a small circle of friends and family. (See [here](#) for the various opinions on the scope of this halacha.)

No such difference was made in terms of the laws of *bishul akum*. As such, when a non-Jewish caterer cooks food, the food is considered *bishul akum*. This is true despite the fact that the customers and the caterers do not (generally) have much social interaction at all. The reason that no difference is made regarding *bishul akum* as it is with *pat akum* is that the sages did not generally make exceptions to their decrees out of fear that such exceptions could lead to confusion. This idea is called *lo plug* (they did not differentiate). On the other hand, they did differentiate in regards to bread because bread is a staple of life and they recognized the need to allow it so that people would have food to eat.

It is noteworthy that the [Mahari Tzahalon](#) (responsa 161) writes that the leniency of *pat palter* also applies to *bishul*. But the [Chida](#) (in Birkei Yosef 112:9) proves that both the early and late authorities (*Rishonim* and *Acharonim*) reject this view. Despite this, the [Minchat Yitzchak](#) (3:26:6) takes the opinion of the Mahari Tzahalon into account in some cases.

### 5) When a Jew Does Not Observe Shabbat

There are differing opinions as to whether bread baked by a Jew who is not Shabbat-observant is considered *pat akum*. The reason for the lenient opinion is that there is no issue of intermarriage with the daughter of a non-observant Jew as she is 100 percent Jewish.

In practice, however, it is advisable to have a Shabbat-observant Jew be involved in the baking of bread in order for the bread to be considered *pat yisrael* (Jewish bread). After the fact (*bedieved*), there is room to be lenient regarding this question (see Igrot Moshe Y.D. 1:45).

In terms of *bishul akum* there is more reason to be strict regarding this question as the reason given by Rashi (that it may lead to eating nonkosher food - see above) also applies to food cooked by non-religious Jews ([Tefilah LeMoshe](#) quoted in [Pit'chai Teshuvah on 113:1](#)).

### 6) Bishul Yisrael for Sefardim

The halacha ([Y.D. 112:9](#)) states that bread can be considered *pat yisrael* if a Jew ignited the fire (or added fuel) in the oven where the bread was baked. Regarding *bishul yisrael*, however, Rabbi Karro rules ([113:7](#)) that a Jew must actually place the food on the fire or stir the food and it is not sufficient for him to merely light (or add to) the fire. Although the Rama disagrees and is lenient in this regard, Sefardim accept the more stringent ruling of Rabbi Karro ([Kaf Hachaim 53 on Y.D. 113](#)). Thus the definition of *bishul yisrael* is different for Sefardim and Ashkenazim whereas this difference does not exist regarding the definition of *pat yisrael*.

### 7) Fit for a King - An Issue or Not?

The laws of *bishul yisroel* apply only to foods fit to be served at a king's table as the sages felt that sharing such foods could lead to increased social interaction ([Y.D. 113:1](#)). Whereas they did not apply these rules to simpler foods which are not fit for a king's table since the sharing of such foods are not important enough to lead to significant social interaction. According to most opinions (see Chelkat Binyamin 112:1 Biurim D.H. Vegam), this leniency does not apply to bread. As such, those who are careful to eat only *pat yisrael* must make sure that all foods which are halachically considered bread (this may include some foods whose blessing is Mezonot, see [here](#)) must be baked by a Jew. This restriction would apply to pretzels and similar snack foods.

The Avnei Nezer (Y.D. 92) is lenient in this regard, but most opinions disagree with his view (see Chelkat Binyamin ibid).

## 8) Emergency Situations

If one is in a place where he cannot get *pat yisrael*, he may eat the bread of a non-Jewish baker (*pat palter*) or, if that's not available, even the (kosher) bread baked by a private non-Jew (see [Y.D. 112:8](#)). This is also true for people who are usually strict regarding *pat yisrael*. (See [Y.D. 112:16](#) regarding how far one must travel to get *pat yisrael*.) Similarly the consumption of *pat akum* is permissible in certain situations in order to avoid disputes (see [Y.D. 112:15](#)).

These are special leniencies given by the sages which enable people to eat bread - a staple of life. As such these leniencies do not apply to *bishul yisrael*. As such one would be allowed to consume *bishul akum* only if one's life was in danger (see Chelkat Binyamin 112:2).

The only exception to this rule is that a gentile may cook for a seriously ill person on Shabbat (even if he is not dangerously ill) as in that case a Jew cannot cook for him since it is Shabbat ([Shulchan Aruch HaRav 128:19](#)) since his life is not in danger. In such a case the rabbis ruled leniently to enable the sick person to eat some hot food.

**May We Merit to Purity in Food, Drink, Thought, Speech, and Action!**

**Wishing you a Shabbat Shalom UMevorach!**

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