

# BISHUL AKUM

by Joshua Kruger

## The Story

"Hi Mom!" said Aryeh, holding the phone to his ear, "I just got home from school. My friend Koby came with me. Is it alright if he stays?"

"Sure!" replied Aryeh's mother. "Why don't you make a little snack to eat now before you start your homework?" she asked.

Aryeh laughed, "Actually that's one of the reasons I was calling! We'd like to make pizzas. I checked the freezer and we have the dough and some cheese in the fridge."

Aryeh's mom thought for a moment, "Actually, that's fine. Please ask the babysitter, Miranda, to cook up some of the pizza sauce and you can make your own pizzas and add whichever toppings you'd like. Have fun but please clean up after yourselves".

Aryeh told Koby the good news. "Mom says that we can have the Pizza! Miranda is going to cook the pizza sauce"

"Sound great" said Koby. "Is it ok if I use your phone, while you start getting things ready?"

"Sure" said Aryeh. "I'll be in the kitchen".

Koby quickly dialed. "Hello Mom? I'm at Aryeh's house. We're going to have pizza but I'm worried because the non-Jewish babysitter is going to cook the pizza sauce. Isn't that *bishul akum*?"

## Discussion

**Q:** What does the term *bishul akum* mean?

**A:** "*Bishul*" means to cook. "*Akum*" stands for עובד כוכבים ומזלות (*oved kochavim umazalot*). Literally, this means one who prays to stars and believes in astrology. Nowadays, the term is applied to anyone who is not Jewish. So the term "*Bishul Akum*" means "Food cooked by someone who is not Jewish".

**Q:** Why is *bishul akum* a problem?

**A:** There are a number of reasons that have been given. One of them is a concern that if someone who is not Jewish cooks our food, then they may make a mistake and use an ingredient that is not kosher (*Or Zarua, Avodah Zarah, 192*).

**Q:** What is the connection between *bishul akum* and the *parashah*?

**A:** In *parshas Devarim* Moshe reminds *Bnei Yisroel* about the time that they traveled by the land of Edom. *Hashem* instructed Moshe to buy food and water from the people of Edom and not to fight them (*Devarim 2:6*). It's a bit complicated, but the Chachamim learn from the *pasuk* that food that is cooked by a non-Jew cannot be eaten by a Jew. This is because the *pasuk* mentions both water and food. The Chachamim learned that the food bought from Sichon would have to be similar to water that would be purchased from Sichon. After water has been heated and cooled down it looks and tastes the same. So too, any food purchased from Sichon would have to look and taste as if it was not heated and cooled by a fire. This meant that the food couldn't be cooked (*Avodah Zarah 37b*).

**Q:** If *bishul akum* is a problem, how come many kosher restaurants have non-Jewish Chefs?

**A:** The law is that a non-Jew cannot do all the cooking. As long as part of the cooking has been done by a Jew, then there is no problem. For Ashkenazim, if a Jew just lights the stove, then a non-Jew can do everything else (*Remo, Yoreh De'ah 113:7*).

**Q:** Is it a problem for Aryeh's babysitter to prepare the pizza sauce by herself?

**A:** There are certain situations where *bishul akum* is not a problem (*Avodah Zarah 38a*, see *Tosefos; Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 113*):

- 1) If the cooked food could have been eaten raw, then *bishul akum* does not apply. The babysitter is making a pizza sauce with ingredients that could all be eaten raw, such as tomatoes.
- 2) The situation of a nanny is different than the classic situation of *bishul akum*. The babysitter is not inviting Jewish people to her home to cook food for them. She is being paid to work in the home, and is usually being told what to cook.
- 3) If the cooked food is not appropriate for serving at a meal for a king. Pizza is a very tasty food, but pizza and pizza sauce are certainly not appropriate for serving at a king's feast.

## Back to Our Story

Koby returned to the kitchen and helped Aryeh and Miranda to prepare a delicious pizza. When it

was ready, they took a moment to admire their creation.

"It's so good, it's fit for a king" Aryeh exclaimed.

"Hopefully not" said Koby with a smile.

(Written by Josh and Tammy Kruger, in collaboration with Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer, of the Institute for Dayanim, and based on his article: <http://www.dinonline.org/2014/07/26/whos-doing-the-cooking>)