Yechezkel Goldberg from <ygoldberg1@netmedia.co.il> wrote:

If a product is known to be owned by a group that would be considered halachically as "idol worship", is it forbidden to use this product even if it has a hechsher (kosher certification)? Case in point: (name withheld) health food which is said to be owned by Scientology; (name withheld) tea which is said to be owned by the Moonies?

Dear Yechezkel,

The Torah does not prohibit using a product simply because it was produced by an idol-worshipper.

However, if you know that the profits go exclusively for 'sacramental' purposes, it then becomes a question of 'lifnei avev' — 'putting a stumbling block before the blind.' Just as it is forbidden to give shrimp cocktail to a Jew, so it is forbidden to give 'idol-worship parephenalia' (sacramental wine, statues, etc.) to an idol-worshipper. The question is: Is giving someone money which will be used to buy a statue the same as giving him the statue itself? Or, since money is one step removed — that is, they don't use the money directly in the worship — is it therefore permitted?

In any case, it is a mitzva not to support 'cult' activities. Therefore, if you are absolutely certain that they are owned wholly or greatly by one of these groups, it would be a good idea to discourage people from buying these products.

A word of caution: If it is not absolutely certain that they are owned by these groups, avary grave sin of harming someone's livelihood could result.

Speaking of cults: At an introductory session of the 'Reincarnated Society of Born-Yesterday Cenobites' a certain Mrs. Finklefarb sits in the back knitting. After the meeting, however, she volunteers for the next level of training. She continues from level to level until she's finally allowed to travel to Tibet, meet the Grand Cenobite, and say three words to him. While waiting in the long line, she patiently knits. Finally she is brought before the leader, looks him in the eye and says "Moishe! Come home!"

Sources:
- Talmud Avoda Zorah 2a
- Chilazon 5:5-6.
- Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 6a.

Paul Goldstein <jx12%tep.bitnet@vms.hjuji.ac.il> wrote:

Do you know the source of the dye that was used to dye the techelet of the tztit the color blue? I thought it was from the snail "Chilazon" but my daughter told me that her Hebrew School teacher said it was from a fish.

Dear Paul,

You're both right! The commentators call the Chilazon a 'fish' since it lives in the water. It appears, though, that the Chilazon is not a normal 'fish', but has a shell and is actually a type of snail. It ascends to the land very rarely, only once every 70 years.

Over time, the exact identity of Chilazon became obscure for various reasons: One reason was its extreme rarity. Because of this, its cost was prohibitive — 10 to 20 times its weight in gold. Another reason: in the 4th century Rome decreed that only 'blue-blooded' royalty could wear Techelet. Although some modern-day Torah scholars maintain that they have re-discovered the Chilazon, their opinion is not universally accepted.

Sources:
- Rabbi Y.M. Tuchashinski, "The Holy City & Temple" 5:5-6.
- Rabbi Y.H. Hertzog, 'Royal Purple & Biblical Blue' ch.11.

Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 148:12.

Paying a worker on time is not considered a "time-bound" mitzvah. Here are 2 explanations:

- Sukka and Tefillin are ‘mitzvot asei sh’hazman gramma’ — ‘positive mitzvot which the time initiates’: You go into the Sukka because it’s the 15th of Tishrei; you put on Tefillin because it’s daytime. The mitzvah to pay your worker, on the other hand, is not time-initiated. Rather, you choose when to hire the worker, an act independent of any time frame. (First sent in by Yoel Polsky <POLSKY@hagiga.jct.ac.il>.)
- True, each time the mitzvah is performed, it is performed during a specific 12-hour period. But the mitzvah in general applies any time of day or night (Rabbi Mordecai Isbee, s.h.).

If you have E-Mail and a question, you can submit it to Ask The Rabbi for possible inclusion in a future edition. Just write your question using your E-Mail program, set the subject to "Ask The Rabbi" and send it to ohr@jer1.co.il. We can't include all questions submitted, but we do try to respond to everyone.