



1. Rabbi Jack Abramowitz, *Is There Any Reason A Jewish Person Can't Enjoy Christmas Lights?*, 12/21/20
<https://jewinthecity.com/2020/12/is-there-anything-wrong-with-enjoying-christmas-lights>

Here's the thing about Christmas lights: pretty much everyone likes them. They're pretty and they're only around for a brief time so we don't get too used to them. Objectively speaking, I think we can't help but notice them and, unless one has some issues with Christmas in general, to enjoy them. I'll admit that I enjoy them, and everyone to whom I mentioned that I was writing this article responded that they like them, too. (Okay, so "pretty much everyone" might be a premature conclusion based on my anecdotal experience but if you like Christmas lights, you're certainly not alone!)

And yet, we have this feeling that it's wrong to like Christmas lights. There's a certain blog where people send their secrets written on postcards; it can be something small like an unrequited crush or something more serious like abuse. Years ago, a woman I know sent in a postcard saying that her secret was that she's Jewish but loves Christmas lights. So they're something of a guilty pleasure.

An Important Introduction

Please read Source #2. Consider: Why does the Rambam bring two pesukim?

2. Rambam (12th century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim 10:12

צו חכמים לבקר חוליהם, ולקבור מתייהם עם מתי ישראל, ולפרנס ענייהם בכלל עניי ישראל, מפני דרכי שלום, הרי נאמר טוב ד' לכל ורחמיו על כל מעשיו, ונאמר דרכיה דרכי נועם וכל נתיבותיה שלום.

The Sages have instructed us to visit their sick [of idolaters], to bury their dead as we bury Jewish dead, and to support their indigent along with Jewish indigent, to promote peaceful paths, as it is written, "Gd is good to all, and His mercy is upon all of His creations," and "Her paths are pleasant paths, and all of her ways are peace."

3. Rambam (12th century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim 11:4

מחשבות בורא עולם אין כח באדם להשיגם כי לא דרכינו דרכיו ולא מחשבותינו מחשבותיו. וכל הדברים האלו של ישוע הנצרי ושל זה הישמעאלי שעמד אחריו אינן אלא לישר דרך למלך המשיח ולתקן את העולם כולו לעבוד את ד' ביהוד, שנ' "כי אז אהפוך אל עמים שפה ברורה לקרוא כולם בשם ד' ולעבדו שכם אחד."

כיצד? כבר נתמלא העולם כולו מדברי המשיח ומדברי התורה ומדברי המצוות ופשטו דברים אלו באיים רחוקים ובעמים רבים ערלי לב והם נושאים ונותנים בדברים אלו ובמצוות התורה. אלו אומרים מצוות אלו אמת היו וכבר בטלו בזמן הזה ולא היו נוהגות לדורות, ואלו אומרים דברים נסתרות יש בהם ואינן כפשוטן וכבר בא משיח וגלה נסתריהם.

וכשיעמוד המלך המשיח באמת ויצליח וירום וינשא מיד הם כולן חוזרין ויודעים ששקר נחלו אבותיהם ושנביאיהם ואבותיהם הטעום.

The thoughts of the Creator are incomprehensible to Man, for our ways are not His and our thoughts are not His. All of those deeds of Jesus of Nazareth and the Ishmaelite who arose after him were meant only to straighten the path to the king, Mashiach, and to prepare the world to serve Gd in unison, as it is written, "I will make the peoples pure of speech so that they will all call upon the Name of Gd and serve Him with one purpose."

How? The world has already been filled with speech about Mashiach and about Torah and about mitzvot, and this speech has spread to distant islands and great nations of uncircumcised hearts, and they discuss these matters and the mitzvot of Torah. These say the mitzvot were true and have been cancelled today and haven't been applicable for generations, and these say mitzvot harbor secrets and they should not be understood simply, and Mashiach will come and reveal their secrets.

When the true Messianic king will arise and prove successful, his [position becoming] exalted and uplifted, they will all return and realize that their ancestors endowed them with a false heritage; their prophets and ancestors cause them to err.

Is Christianity Avodah Zarah for Jews?

Please read sources 4 and 5. Do you know whether Christianity can accept these descriptions of Hashem?

4. Rambam (12th century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei haTorah 1:1

יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות לידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון, והוא ממציא כל נמצא, וכל הנמצאים משמים וארץ ומה שביניהם לא נמצאו אלא מאמתת המצאו.

The foundation of foundations and pillar of wisdoms is to know that there is a First, which caused all that is found, and that all that is found in heaven and earth and all in between is found only because of the truth of the One who made it found.

5. Rambam (12th century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei haTorah 1:5-7

המצוי הזה הוא אלקי העולם אדון כל הארץ, והוא המנהיג הגלגל בכח שאין לו קץ ותכלית, בכח שאין לו הפסק...

וידעת דבר זה מצות עשה שנאמר "אנכי ד' אלקיך", ...

אלוק זה אחד הוא ואינו שנים ולא יתר על שנים, אלא אחד... ולא אחד כגוף שהוא נחלק למחלקות ולקצוות... והואיל ואינו גוף לא יארעו לו מאורעות הגופות... וידעת דבר זה מצות עשה שנאמר "ד' אלקינו ד' אחד."

This Being is the Gd of the universe, master of the world, who runs the sphere with an infinite and unending force, an uninterrupted force...

Knowing this is a commandment, as it says, "I am Hashem your Gd"...

This Gd is one, not two and not more than two, but one... Not one like a body, which is divided into divisions and extremes... And since He has no body, that which happens to bodies does not happen to Him... And knowing this is a commandment, as it says, "Hashem is our Gd, Hashem is one."

6. Talmud, Sanhedrin 63a

כל המשתף שם שמים ודבר אחר נעקר מן העולם שנאמר +שמות כ"ב+ בלתי לד' לבדו

One who joins the Name of Heaven with anything else is uprooted from the world, as per, "One who sacrifices to a god will be destroyed, other than to Gd alone."

Benefit from Avodah Zarah

Please read sources 8 and 9. Based on these, are we allowed to admire holiday lights?

7. Rambam (12th century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avodah Zarah 7:2

עבודת כוכבים ומשמשיה ותקרובת שלה וכל הנעשה בשבילה אסור בהנאה שנאמר "ולא תביא תועבה אל ביתך"...

One may not benefit from idolatry, its tools and sacrifices and all that is made for it, as it says, "And you shall not bring *toevah* into your home"...

8. Rabbi Yosef Karo, Rabbi Moshe Isserless (16th century Israel/Poland), Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 142:15

אסור לשמוע כלי שיר של עבודת כוכבים או להסתכל בנוי עבודת כוכבים, כיון שנהנה בראייה.

הגה: ומיהו דבר שאין מתכוין, מותר.

Rabbi Karo: One may not listen to musical instruments of idolatry, or gaze at ornaments of idolatry, since one benefits by looking.

Rabbi Isserless: But unintentional [listening or looking] is permitted.

9. Rabbi Shabbtai haKohen (17th century Lithuania), Shach to Yoreh Deah 142:33

באלילים עצמם שנעבדו אסור להסתכל בהן לראות נויין, אבל צורות שנעשו לנוי ולא לעבוד מבואר בתו' והרא"ש דמותר:

One may not gaze at idols themselves, which are worshipped, to see their ornaments. But forms made for beauty and not for worship are permitted, as explained by Tosafot and the Rosh.

10. Rabbi Avraham Gombiner (17th century Poland), Magen Avraham 225:20

והא דאמרי' "אסור להסתכל בצלם דמות אדם רשע" הכא מיירי שרואהו, ומ"מ נראה דדוקא להסתכל בו ביותר ולהתבונן בצלמו ודמותו אסור, אבל ראייה בעלמא מותר...

When we say "One may not gaze upon the form of a wicked person," it refers to seeing him, but it appears to be a prohibition specifically against gazing upon him excessively and contemplating his image, but just seeing is allowed...

A Broader Concern

Please see sources 11 and 12. What is the "broader concern" that we might be concerned about?

11. Talmud, Avodah Zarah 17a

"הרחק מעליה דרכך (משלי ה:ה)" זו מינות.

"Distance your path from her (Mishlei 5:8)" – This refers to heresy.

12. Talmud, Sanhedrin 63b

"ושם אלהים אחרים לא תזכירו" שלא יאמר אדם לחבירו שמור לי בצד עבודה זרה פלונית.

"And you shall not mention the names of foreign gods" – that one should not say to another, "Wait for me besides idol X."

13. Talmud, Avodah Zarah 20a

אסור לאדם שיאמר כמה נאה עובדת כוכבים זו.

One may not say, "How attractive is that idolater!"

14. Talmud, Avodah Zarah 46a

מה ת"ל "ואבדתם את שמם מן המקום ההוא"? לכנות לה שם.

What is the lesson of "And you shall destroy their name from that place?" That you should give it a nickname.

15. Prof. Bruce Hoffman, *It's Not Easy to Be Jewish on American Campuses Today*, Time Magazine Nov. 10 '23

<https://time.com/6333456/jewish-students-college-antisemitism-essay/>

It's not easy to be a Jew at an American university today. As one student tearfully explained to me, "We're exhausted and we're beleaguered and no one seems to understand." University administrators have indeed mostly failed their Jewish students, staff, and faculty. Fears of imposing censorship and citing of First Amendment rights have allowed to circulate freely on campus Holocaust denial, the invocation of white privilege to dismiss antisemitism, and the rejection of the Jewish people's inalienable right to self-determination.

How did it come to this?

There is first the obvious fact that, if Jews comprise only 2.4 percent of the United States population, Jewish students will invariably almost always be a minority on all but a few campuses. Even at universities where Jewish students comprise larger minorities, such as at Cornell, Columbia, and Tulane, they have often experienced the same opprobrium that has been seen on campuses across the country.

16. Rabbi Menachem Meiri (13th century Catalonia), Commentary to Avodah Zarah 46a

עובדי האלילים והאשרות ודומיהם שהיו קורין לע"ז שלהם בשם נאה כדי ליתן חנה על לב שומעיה ראוי לישראל המזכירה לכנות לה שם לגנאי כדי להסיר לב עובדיה מעליה ולהפוך עבודתו לשם ית'.

Worshippers of idols, *asheiros* and the like would give their idolatry an attractive name, so that it would gain favor in the hearts of those who heard it. So a Jew who mentions it should use a degrading name, to remove the heart of its servants from it and convert his service to that of Gd.

Holiday Lights in a Succah?

Please see source 17. Do you agree with him regarding use of these lights in a succah?

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Finally, it should go without saying that even if it's permitted to admire Christmas lights, it would be prohibited for Jews to decorate their homes with them in December, as this would violate the prohibition against copying other nations' practices (Leviticus 18:3). To decorate one's succah with such lights, however, should be permitted as the non-Jewish practice is specifically to use such lights in December.