



# Beverages, Bishul Akum and Coffee Shops

Our Sages instituted a decree that certain foods cooked by non-Jews are prohibited for consumption, even if the ingredients themselves are entirely kosher. This prohibition is known as *Bishul Akum*. According to most early authorities (see *Tosafot*, *Avodah Zara* 38a), the primary reason for this decree is to prevent excessive social interaction that could potentially lead to intermarriage. The *Gemara* provides specific examples in which food cooked by a non-Jew does not fall under this prohibition—particularly when there is no intent to cook in the traditional sense. This article will explore the halachic status of *Bishul Akum* as it pertains specifically to beverages.

## THE DISPUTE

The *Kenesset Hagedolah* (Responsa *Bae'i Chayei* YD 155) addressed the question of whether coffee beans cooked by a non-Jew would render the resulting coffee prohibited due to *Bishul Akum*. A similar question is discussed in responsa *Panim Me'iroi* (2:62), regarding beer that had been cooked by non-Jews. Additionally, there is testimony that the pious AR"Y (OBM) refrained from consuming beverages prepared by non-Jew (*Knesset Hagedolah* *ibid*).

While these sources could be interpreted

as supporting a stringent approach, the overwhelming consensus among halachic authorities throughout the generations has been to be lenient with regard to beverages. In fact, beverages are generally not considered subject to the prohibition of *bishul akum*.

Two primary Talmudic sources support this lenient position. First, the *Gemara* (*Avodah Zara* 38a) explicitly states that water—even when boiled or otherwise cooked—is not included in the prohibition of *Bishul Akum*. Based on this, *Tosafot* (*Avodah Zara* 31b) argue that beer is also excluded, since the barley is considered *tafel* (insignificant) to the water. This is evidenced by the fact that the blessing over beer changes to *Shehakol*, indicating that the barley has lost its halachic status as a primary ingredient. *Tosafot* conclude that, just as the blessing changes, we consider the beverage essentially as water with additives. Since water is not subject to *Bishul Akum*, the same exemption applies to beer. This reasoning is adopted by the *Pri Chadash* (YD 114:6) and *Aruch HaShulchan* (YD 113:22), who extend *Tosafot's* logic to all beverages. The second argument relates to coffee: even if one considers ground coffee as a cooked product,



it has no use without water. Therefore, it is not independently classified as food, and thus would not fall under the prohibition of *Bishul Akum*.

In conclusion, all major halachic authorities agree that beverages do not constitute a violation of *Bishul Akum*, even when prepared by non-Jews.

### COFFEE SHOPS

In light of the above rulings, it would appear permissible to purchase regular coffee prepared by non-Jews. However, many kashrut organizations advise against consuming coffee in non-kosher establishments—particularly overseas—not because of *Bishul Akum*, but due to other kosher concerns.

These establishments often serve both kosher and non-kosher items, with hot meat sandwiches being among the most problematic. Daily cleaning routines typically involve washing all utensils with hot water, and sometimes this is done without soap. Such practices raise significant concerns regarding cross-contamination and require case-by-case halachic evaluation by a competent authority. Although kiosks may differ slightly in setup, caution is still advised.

Purchasing coffee from automated vending machines presents fewer halachic concerns. However, many machines also dispense non-kosher beverages. Therefore, one should verify that there is no mixture or cross-contamination before using them.

### COFFEE IN ISRAEL

In Israel, if one enters a coffee shop that is under kosher supervision—even if not adhering to one's personal stringency—it is generally permissible to purchase coffee or tea. Nevertheless, it is advisable to request a disposable cup. Additionally, when using milk, one should confirm that it carries a certification with which they are comfortable. ■

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