

Hosting Conversion Candidates for Yom Tov Meals¹

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The Talmud (Beitza 21a) teaches us that melachos involving preparation of food (*ochel nefesh*) are only permissible on Yom Tov for the sake of Jews and not for the sake of non-Jews. Therefore, one is not permitted to invite a non-Jew to eat with him on Yom Tov, lest he prepare extra food for the non-Jew (ibid. 21b). This is codified in Rambam (Hilchos Yom Tov 1:13) and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 512:1). At first glance this prohibition poses a potentially insurmountable obstacle to inviting potential converts for a Yom Tov meal.²

Shulchan Aruch does rule that if a non-Jew shows up uninvited one may feed him on Yom Tov, as we are not concerned in that situation that the Jew may end up cooking extra. “Crashing” would avoid any halachic problems but may be socially awkward and/or not appreciated by the host.³ There are, however, various other grounds for leniency discussed by *poskim*, although some are limited practical relevance and/or not agreed upon by others.

Rav Nissim Karelitz (*Chut Hashani* Yom Tov 4:3 p. 64) writes that if one does not invite a non-Jew but merely states “I have food available for you,” that would be permissible.

Minchas Yitzchak (2:118) discusses the permissibility of a Jewish hotel proprietor with a non-Jewish kitchen staff catering to non-Jewish guests on a Yom Tov. He rules that as long as all the food preparation is done by the non-Jewish staff and there is no possibility of a Jew doing any cooking it would be permissible. This is because cooking additional amounts for a non-Jew in the same pot that one is already using for a Jew is only prohibited rabbinically, and having a non-Jew do melacha on a Jew’s behalf is only prohibited rabbinically. A *shvus d’shvus* (double rabbinic prohibition) is permitted in cases of need, and in this case the factor of *darkei shalom* would be sufficient to permit a *shvus d’shvus*.⁴ Rav Hershel Schachter reasons that along the same lines if one were to have non-Jewish help in the kitchen doing all the work, to the point where there would be no realistic possibility of the Jewish homeowner doing any food preparation himself, it would be permissible to invite prospective converts for a Yom Tov meal. However, this is usually not a practical solution.

There is some discussion in contemporary literature of having the invited guest acquire the food that he will consume during the Yom Tov meal in advance of Yom Tov. In the Mossad HaRav Kook edition of the Rashba on Beitza (annotated by Rav Yisrael Sklar), the author of the footnotes (21b ft. 188) represents that he heard from Rav Elyashiv that if one wishes to invite a *mechalel Shabbos* for a Yom Tov

¹ Thanks to Rabbi Yona Reiss and Rabbi Joshua Flug for their comments on this article.

² See *Shu”t Zayis Ra’anan* (2:7:4), who points out that it is permissible to invite a non-Jew for a meal on a day of Yom Tov that falls on Shabbos.

³ There may, however, be creative ways to “crash” in an appropriate fashion. Some have suggested, for example, having a third party suggest that a conversion candidate show up at a meal at a host known to have many guests over and have the third party let the host know that the conversion candidate may come unannounced for one of the meals.

⁴ However, *Minchas Yitzchak* does suggest that as a practical matter it may not be advisable to operate a hotel in this fashion, as this may lead to a diminution of the sanctity of Yom Tov.

meal, he may acquire the food that the guest will consume on the guest's behalf before Yom Tov and tell him that that food belongs to him. It is unclear from this citation whether this leniency would extend to a non-Jew as well, as the question of whether one may invite a *mechalel Shabbos* for a Yom Tov meal may itself be dependent on a *machlokes rishonim*, and even though Mishneh Brurah (512:2) appears to be *machmir*, there is more to be meikel about.⁵ Rav Nissim Karelitz (*Chut Hashani* *ibid.*) does not believe that having the non-Jew acquire the food before Yom Tov eliminates the prohibition of inviting him for a meal, as there is still a concern that the Jew may cook extra on behalf of the non-Jew.⁶

Shuchan Shlomo (512:5) records that R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach was asked on behalf of a rosh yeshiva in Russia whether it was appropriate to invite a group of boys for meals on Yom Tov even though some of the boys were not Jewish but were interested in converting. He responded that it was not necessary to have the conversion candidates acquire their food before Yom Tov (implying that this would be a viable option when necessary), as the concern that one may come to cook extra on behalf of a non-Jew is only relevant for a guest that one is honored to have (see Mishneh Brurah 512:9, who appears to explain the dispensation to feed one's *eved* or *shifcha* on this basis); in this case the host is not honored but rather is doing a favor in hosting the guests.

Rav Gedalia Dov Schwartz suggests a novel leniency in this matter. In addressing the controversy behind the 1848 conversion in Yerushalayim of an individual who underwent milah before Shabbos and was advised that since he had not yet undergone tevillah he needed to be mechalel Shabbos, ⁷ *Binyan Tziyon* (91) writes that such a person is no longer a full fledged non-Jew even though he is not yet a full fledged Jew, and therefore may observe Shabbos. Taking this argument one step further, *Minchas Elazar* (3:8) allowed for the burial in a Jewish cemetery of a woman who had been at the end of a conversion process but had not yet completed the geirus, albeit at a distance of eight amos for the other graves. Based on this approach that a conversion candidate may have a slightly different status than a regular non-Jew, Rav Schwartz allows inviting conversion candidates for Yom Tov meals.

In an article in *Ohr Yisroel* 75 (Tishrei 5778 pp. 137-142), R. Akiva Dershowitz, a rosh kollel in Yerushalayim, quotes an unpublished teshuva of Rav Asher Weiss regarding inviting non-Jews (not only conversion candidates) to Yom Tov meals that suggests the possibility of leniency under extenuating circumstances based on a combination of factors. Since nowadays we cook almost everything, if not everything, before Yom Tov, and the reason for the *gezeirah* does not exist to the same extent that it used to, we could be *mitzoref* a number of minority opinions to be meikel when necessary, including (1) The Meiri's position that if one says to a non-Jew that he is only inviting him on condition that he will not cook anything extra for him, he may extend the invitation; (2) The Sefer Hatanya's position (quoted in but

⁵ See, for example, *Tzitz Eliezer* (8:17). The question of whether the prohibition to invite a non-Jew for a Yom Tov meal extends to a *mechalel Shabbos* may depend of whether the impetus for the *gezeirah* was the concern that one may specifically cook non-kosher food, in which case the concern should be limited to a non-Jew. This is the position of the Rashba and the Ran. R. Moshe Klein (*Mishnas HaGer* p. 31) suggests that according to the Rashba there would be grounds to allow inviting a conversion candidate, as there would be no concern that would cook non-kosher food on his or her behalf.

⁶ If one were to have a non-Jew acquire the food before Yom Tov presumably it would have to involve a *kinyan* that is effective for non-Jews, as is relevant for *mechiras chametz*.

⁷ For a summary and analysis of source material on this topic see Rabbi J. David Bleich's article in *Contemporary Halakhic Problems Vol. IV* beginning on page 145. For an interesting historical footnote of no halachic relevance please see <http://seforim.blogspot.com/2014/02/rabbi-jacob-ettlinger-and-warder-cresson.html>.

limited in application by *Magen Avraham* 512:2) that if everything is already prepared one may invite a non Jew; (3) One answer in the Rashba that the reason one may invite his non-Jewish *eved* or *shifcha* to a Yom Tov meal is that even if one ends up cooking extra food there is enough food already cooked to suffice for the *eved* or *shifcha*, which should be relevant to any other non-Jewish guest that one would invite nowadays when almost all food is cooked before Yom Tov.

In conclusion, it is important to note and to explain to conversion candidates that to the extent that there are halachic impediments to inviting them for meals on Yom Tov, that in no way diminishes our interest in assisting them through the conversion process and in integrating into the community. One who rules stringently about Yom Tov invitations should still try to provide positive, educational, and meaningful Yom Tov experiences for conversion candidates in his community.