

# Shoel U'Mashiv

## The Dog Who Must Not Be Named

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**Q** - Someone who had been playing with their neighbor's dog for years realized one day that the dog's name might not be so kosher. The dog is named "Zeus" and they wanted to know if they are still allowed to call it that?

**A** - What is the issue?

One of the most basic tenants of the Jewish faith is "you shall have no other gods besides Me" (*Shemos* 20:3). This is the second of the 10 commandments. This prohibition we refer to as *Avodah Zarah*, idol worship. The *Shulchan Aruch Y.D.* 147:1 tells us that only are we not allowed to worship idols, we cannot even mention their names. The *Taz* 1 says this means even just mentioning the name in general is a problem. The *Gemara Sanhedrin* 63b derives this prohibition from the verse "the names of other gods you should not mention; they should not be heard on your lips" (*Shemos* 23:13). There is one exception to this rule. The *Shulchan Aruch Y.D.* 147:4 says that one is allowed to mention names of *Avodah Zarah* that are written in the Torah.

Are there any exceptions?

The *Darchei Teshuva Y.D.* 147:4 cites the *Beis Yitzchak* who deals with a case of a *Bikkur Cholim* in a certain city that gave themselves a Greek name meaning "health". However, it was pointed out that this Greek name was actually the name of the Greek god of health. The *Beis Yitzchak* says that it is prohibited to use any name that is also used to describe a deity. But if the name is no longer associated with the deity, then it is acceptable. He gives the example of the word "*mammon*" used in the *Gemara* to describe money. He says that it was the name of the Greek god of money, but since it is no longer associated with the deity, it is a permissible term. Similarly, the *Sefer Yereim* 75 says that all names of *Avodah Zarah* mentioned in the Torah are deities that have been nullified. Therefore, when the *Shulchan Aruch* says we can mention names of *Avodah Zarah* that are written in the Torah, we can extend that to all *Avodah Zarah* that are no longer worshiped.

Can they still refer to the dog by its name?

Based on the above discussion, it seems permissible to call the dog Zeus since it is a deity no longer worshiped and the average person does not associate it with *Avodah Zarah*. This is similar to the names of the months of the Gregorian calendar, which are all named after *Avodah Zarah* that are no longer worshiped and we mention freely with no reservations.