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Avodah Zarah Daf 44

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Mishna

Rabbi Yosi says: To destroy idolatry, one may grind it, and spread the powder to the wind, or throw it to sea. The Sages say spreading the powder will cause benefit, as the powder will fertilize the land where it settles. This is forbidden, as it is written: Nothing of the banned property shall adhere to your hand. (43b)

Grinding Up Idols

The *braisa* states: Rabbi Yosi said to them: Doesn't the verse say: *And your sins that you made, the (golden) calf, I took and I burned it with fire, and I pounded it, grinding it finely until it was fine like earth, and I threw its powder into the stream that was coming down from the mountain?* [This shows that one may grind idols and scatter them into the wind!]

They told him: Is that a proof? The verse says: *And he sprinkled it over the waters and gave it to the Children of Israel to drink.* He intended to check them like a *sotah*. [Just as a *sotah* is tested by her drinking the waters with the scroll mixed in it, so too they were being tested with the waters mixed with the powder of the idol.]

Rabbi Yosi responded: Doesn't the verse say: *And also Machah, the mother of (the father of) King Asa, took down from the royal influence a statue that she made for the asheirah (tree that was worshipped), and he ground it and burnt it in Nachal Kidron?* [This shows that one may grind idols to get rid of them.]

They said to him: This is not proof, as the Kidron Valley does not grow vegetation (*and therefore nobody will benefit from those ashes*).

The *Gemora* asks: Is this so? Doesn't the *braisa* state that the blood from the *korbanos* (of the *Outer chatas* and *Inner chatas*) would mix into the stream that would flow into the Kidron Valley, and would be sold to the gardeners for fertilizer, but one commits *me'ilah* for using it illegally (*it was forbidden to benefit from it unless money was paid to the Temple treasury for it*).

The *Gemora* answers: There were different places in the Kidron Valley - some of which grew vegetation, and some which did not.

The *Gemora* asks: What was her statue? [The verse uses the word, "miflatzta".]

Rav Yehudah says: This means that it was an object that caused tremendous scorn. This is as Rav Yosef says: She attached a member-like attachment to it, and cohabited with it every day.

Rabbi Yosi said to them: Doesn't the verse say: *And he (Chizkiyah) ground up the copper snake that Moshe had made?*

They responded: Is that a proof? The verse says: *And Hashem said to Moshe, make for yourself a snake.* This implies he should make a snake from his own money. Accordingly, anyone who worshipped it could not



render it forbidden, as a person does not render something forbidden when he worships it if it is not his. In this case, it did not really need to be destroyed. Rather, Chizkiyah saw that people were starting to be drawn to it. He therefore ground it up.

Rabbi Yosi said to them: Doesn't the verse say: *And they left their idols there, and David and his men carried them away?*" How do we see that this means they scattered it into the wind? This is as Rav Yosef translated the verse: *you should scatter them and the wind will carry them.*

They asked him: Is this a proof? The verse says: *And they burned it in fire.* However, it does not say and they burned it and then carried it, implying that they did each action at separate times. How can this be? [*If it was forbidden, it should have been burned immediately. If not, one can still derive benefit from it.*]

The *Gemora* answers: This is as stated by Rav Huna. Rav Huna asks that these verses contradict each other, and answers that before Ittai the Gittite arrived (*a gentile on David's camp*), David said to burn them. Afterwards, he said Ittai could nullify it, and they could therefore benefit from it afterwards.

This is as the verse says: *And he removed the crown of Milcom from its head, and it weighed a talent of gold (and it was on David's head).* [*How could David have used a crown that belonged to an idol?*]

Rav Nachman says: Ittai the Gittite nullified it.

The *Gemora* asks: If it weighed so much, how could David have put it on his head?

Rav Yehudah says in the name of Rav: It was fit for David (*but indeed, he did not wear it*).

Rabbi Yosi the son of Rabbi Chanina says: He had a magnet which made it hover over his head.

Rabbi Elozar says: There was a precious stone on it that was worth a talent of gold.

This was for me because your commandments I guarded. What does "this" mean? The *Gemora* answers: For a reward for keeping your *mitzvos*, this crown was my testimony.

What does this testimony refer to? Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: He would put the crown on the area where he put his *tefillin*, and the crown would settle there. The *Gemora* asks: How did he wear his *tefillin*? Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchak says: There is enough area on the head for two pairs of *tefillin*.

And they took out the king's son, and they put on him the "neizer" and the testimony. *Neizer* means crown, and *eidus*, Rav Yehudah says in the name of Rav, is testimony that whoever from the House of David is fit for kingship will have the crown fit him.

Adoniyah ben Chagis haughtily said that he will be king. Rav Yehudah says in the name of Rav that he tried to have the crown fit him, and it did not.

And he made a chariot, horses, and fifty men run before him. The *Gemora* asks: What was special about these men? The *braisa* taught: They all were missing their spleen, and had the soles of their feet dug out (*so they could run better*). (43b – 44a)

Mishna

Proclos ben Philosofos asked Rabban Gamliel in Acco when he was in the bathhouse of Aphrodite: It says in your Torah: *Nothing of the banned property shall adhere to your hand.* How, then, can you bathe in the bathhouse of Aphrodite (*which was located in the*

courtyard of a building that contained the idol Aphrodite)? He answered: One is not allowed to respond (regarding Torah law) in the bathhouse. When he exited, he said: I did not go in its boundaries, it came into my boundaries. [*The bathhouse, which was built for the public, existed before the statue was erected.*] People do not say, "Let us make a nice bathhouse for Aphrodite," but rather "Let's make a nice statue of Aphrodite for the bathhouse." Another thing he said was that if people gave you a lot of money, you would still not go before your idol naked, or as one who had emissions, or urinate in front of it. This statue is in front of the gutter, and everyone urinates in front of it. The only type of statue prohibited is one that is considered "their god," where they act as if it is a god. A statue which is not treated as a god is permitted. (44b)

Aphrodite

The Gemora asks: How could he have done this? Didn't Rabbah bar bar Chanah say in the name of Rabbi Yochanan that a person is always allowed to think about Torah besides for in a bathhouse and bathroom? [*How could he have answered that one cannot talk Torah in a bathhouse?*] If you will say it was permitted because he said it in a secular language, this cannot be. Didn't Abaye say that one can say mundane things in Hebrew in the bathhouse, but one cannot say holy things in the bathhouse, even if he says them in a secular language?

The Gemora answers: The Mishna means that when he left the bathhouse, he told him that he was not allowed to answer in a bathhouse.

Rav Chama bar Yosef, son of Rebbe, said in the name of Rabbi Oshaya: Rabban Gamliel gave that officer a deceptive answer (*that was merely meant to push off the question*). However, Rav Chama continued, I think (*unlike Rabbi Oshaya*) it was a good answer.

Why was it a deceptive answer? He said: This statue is in front of the gutter, and everyone urinates in front of it. Why should this make a difference? Rava says that the idol Pe'or should prove this is not a way of negating an idol, for this (*when people defecate before it*) is what people do to serve it, and it is not nullified!

Rav Chama continues: I say that it was not deceptive, as Pe'or is served in this fashion while Aphrodite is not.

Abaye says: Rabbi Oshaya's reason (*that it was a deceptive answer*) is because he said, "I did not go in its boundaries, it came into my boundaries." Why is this relevant? Doesn't the Mishna say that if a garden or bathhouse belongs to an idolatrous group, one cannot benefit if he pays money, but can benefit for free? [*In other words, it is indeed permitted to benefit from it anyway, even if it would be an idolatrous statue, so long as one does not pay!*]

Rav Chama says: This is not deceptive, as Rabban Gamliel's using the bathhouse is as if he was paying (*as the idolaters benefit from the fact that such a famous personage uses their bathhouse*).

Rav Simi bar Chiya says: Rabbi Oshaya's reason (*that it was a deceptive answer*) is because he said, "This statue is in front of the gutter, and everyone urinates in front of it." Why should this make a difference? The Mishna says: If he urinated in front of it, spit in front of it, dragged it, or through feces on it, the idol is not nullified. [*This shows a denigrating act does not take the idolatrous status away from an idol.*]

Rav Chama says: This is not deceptive, as an idolater is assumed to just be momentarily infuriated at his idol if he does this. However, here, it was a constant denigration.

Rabbah bar Ulla says: Rabbi Oshaya's reason (*that it was a deceptive answer*) is because he said, People do not say, "Let us make a nice bathhouse for Aphrodite," but rather "Let's make a nice statue of Aphrodite for the bathhouse." And even so, what of it? Has it not been taught in a *braisa*: If one says, "This house is for an idol," or "This cup is for an idol," he has said nothing because there can be no verbal dedication to an idol!

Rav Chama says: This is not deceptive, as granted that the use of the bathhouse is not actually forbidden, it is nevertheless intended as an ornament of the statue (*and is consequently prohibited*). (44b)

sukkah." In the same vein, it is better that I should be called ignorant but still observe the *mitzvah* of *tefillin*" (*Shefa' Kodesh – Tzanz*).

DAILY MASHAL

Better to Be Called Ignorant

The *Divrei Chayim* of Tzanz zt"l believed (*Responsa Divrei Chayim*) that the *Gemora* means two *tefillin* placed on the head side by side. In his opinion, then, it is a custom of the ignorant to use a mirror to pinpoint the *tefillin* in the middle of one's head as, at any rate, they are in their proper place, but other *poskim* disagree.

When HaGaon Rav Yizchak Zev of Brisk zt"l was staying with a Tzanzer *chasid* in Kinitza, he used a mirror to position his *tefillin*. His host did not want to remark anything but left a copy of *Divrei Chayim* on the table, open to the relevant responsum. The Gaon immediately understood his intention. "Since you're a Tzanzer", he said, "I'll answer you with a story about the *Divrei Chayim* himself. Once it rained on the first night of Sukkos but the *Divrei Chayim* remained in his *sukkah*. People remarked that the *Gemora* says that if it is raining, someone who stays in the *sukkah* is called a *hedyot* (a simpleton). "Better I should be called a *hedyot*," he replied, "but still observe the *mitzvah* of