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Avodah Zarah Daf 26

Produced by Rabbi Avrohom Adler, Kollel Boker Beachwood

Daf Notes is currently being dedicated to the neshamot of

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May the studying of the Daf Notes be a zechus for their neshamot and may their souls find peace in Gan Eden and be bound up in the Bond of life

### ***Mishna***

A Jewish woman should not help an idolatress give birth, as she is producing a child who will worship idols. However, a Jewish woman can have a non-Jewish woman be the midwife when she is giving birth. A Jewish woman should not nurse the baby of an idolatress. However, a non-Jewish woman can nurse the baby of a Jew with the Jew’s consent. (26a)

### ***Delivering the Child of an Idolatress***

The *braisa* states: A Jewish woman should not help an idolatress give birth, as she is producing a child who will worship idols. A Jewish woman cannot have a non-Jewish woman be the midwife when she is giving birth, as she is suspected of killing (*and might kill the baby*). These are the words of Rabbi Meir. The *Chachamim* say: A non-Jewish woman can be the midwife for a Jewish woman as long as others are watching, not by herself.

The *Gemora* explains: Rabbi Meir holds that even others watching is insufficient, as she might put pressure on the soft area by his forehead and kill him, and it will not be apparent that she killed him. This is akin to the woman who said to her friend: One who births Jews, the daughter of one who births Jews! Her friend replied: You should have as many evil things happen to you as the amount of blood that I have taken from them, for I spill their blood like the foam of a raging river.

The *Gemora* asks: What do the Rabbis say to this?

The *Gemora* answers: The Rabbis understand that she was just trying to answer her friend’s claim, but what she said was not true. (26a)

### ***Nursing the Child of an Idolatress***

The *Mishna* says that a Jewish woman should not nurse the baby of an idolatress.

The *braisa* states: A Jewish woman should not nurse the baby of an idolatress, as she is producing a child who will worship idols. A Jewish woman cannot have a non-Jewish woman nurse her baby, as she is suspected of killing (*and might kill the baby*). These are the words of Rabbi Meir. The *Chachamim* say: A non-Jewish woman can nurse the baby of a Jewish woman as long as others are watching, not by herself.

The *Gemora* explains: Rabbi Meir holds that even others watching is insufficient, as she might put smear poison on her breasts that will kill the baby.

The *Gemora* explains further that both of these *braisos* are necessary (*though at first glance it would seem that one could be derived from the other*). If we would only know the laws regarding a midwife, it is possible that the Rabbis only permit this because people can clearly watch her. However, perhaps they do not permit her to nurse even with people watching, as she might have previously put poison on her breasts (*and nobody would know that she had killed him even if they were watching her nursing*). This



is why it had to say the case of nursing. If it would only say the case regarding nursing, perhaps we would say that Rabbi Meir would only forbid nursing with others watching, as there is no way to ensure she will not kill the child if she puts poison on her breasts beforehand. However, perhaps he would permit a midwife because people could see if she did anything wrong. This is why both cases must be stated.

The *Gemora* asks a question from a *braisa*. The *braisa* states: A Jewish woman can be a midwife for an idolatress if she gets paid, but not for free. (*This is unlike our Mishna!*)

Rav Yosef answers: It is permitted if she gets paid because otherwise the idolatress will hate her. (*If it is for free, she can merely say she does not work for free, which is normal.*)

Rav Yosef also thought that if she does so on *Shabbos* it should only be permitted if she takes payment.

Abaye said: She can say that she only desecrates *Shabbos* by being a midwife on *Shabbos* for those that keep *Shabbos*.

Rav Yosef thought to say that if she is offered pay to nurse a non-Jewish baby, she may do so, due to hatred.

Abaye said: She can claim - if she is single that she wants to get married, and if she is married, she can claim that it makes her less desirable for her future husband.

Rav Yosef thought to say that although the *braisa* states that an idolatress and shepherd of small animals should not be saved from a pit, nor pushed into it, if they say they will pay to be saved, it is permitted to save them.

Abaye says: He can say to them, "I have to go save my son who is on the roof." Alternatively, he can say, "I was invited today to go to the meeting area of the government (*and I cannot be late even in exchange for this money.*)" (26b)

### **Lowering into a Pit**

Rabbi Avahu taught before Rabbi Yochanan: An idolater and shepherd of small animals should not be saved from a pit nor pushed into it. However, heretics, a moser (*one who tells gentiles to seize money of Jews*), and renegades should be lowered into a pit and not raised.

Rabbi Yochanan replied: I derive that the verse: *for all lost objects of your brother* includes renegades (*that we should return their lost objects*), and you say we should kill them?!

Rabbi Yochanan therefore said: They indeed should not be part of the statement above.

The *Gemora* asks: Why didn't he answer that there is a difference between a person who constantly sins due to desire, and one who constantly sins for the sole purpose of sinning? (*The latter indeed should be killed.*)

The *Gemora* answers: This is because he understands that if someone sins in defiance of the Torah (*i.e. will eat non-kosher even if he could just as easily eat kosher*), he is considered a heretic (*and is therefore already on the list.*) (26a – 26b)

### **Renegades**

It was taught: Rav Acha and Ravina argue regarding how to classify a renegade (*constant sinner*). One says: if he does so due to his desires, he is merely a renegade. If he does so in defiance of the torah, he is a heretic. The other says: Both are merely considered renegades. What is a heretic? This is someone who worships idols.

The *Gemora* asks a question from a *braisa*. The *braisa* says: If he ate a fly or mosquito, he is a renegade. This must be someone who sins for the sake of sinning, and yet he is only considered a renegade!



The *Gemora* answers: The case is where he is curious to taste these creatures (*and therefore does so out of desire, not sin*). (26b)

### ***Removing the Ability to Ascend***

The master stated: They would lower people like this into the pit, but not raise them up.

The *Gemora* asks: If you say they put these people into the pits, it is obvious they are not rescued!?

Rav Yosef bar Chama said in the name of Rav Sheishes: This was only required to teach that if there is a ledge for him to use to possibly climb out of the pit, one should scrape it away and make him unable to get out, in order that he should die there. He should rationalize to the person by saying that he is taking it away in order that his animals should not die by using this ledge to descend into the pit.

Rabbah and Rav Yosef say: If there was a large stone, one should cover the pit with it and say that he needs to walk his sheep by this pit, and he wants to make sure none of them fall in.

Ravina says: If there is a ladder in the pit, he should take it away by saying, "My son is on the roof and I need to take him down." (26b)

### ***Circumcision***

The *braisa* states: A Jew may circumcise an idolater in order that he should convert. He cannot circumcise him in order to take away a parasite that is in that area. However, an idolater cannot circumcise a Jew, as we suspect that he will kill him. These are the words of Rabbi Meir. The *Chachamim* say: An idolater may circumcise a Jew if others are watching him, not by himself. Rabbi Meir says: Even if others are watching him he should not do so, as he might

tilt the knife and cause him to be a *kerus shafchah* (*one whose genitals are mutilated*).

The *Gemora* asks: Does Rabbi Meir indeed hold that an idolater cannot perform circumcision? The *braisa* states: If a city has no Jewish doctor, but it does have an idolater and a Cuthean who are doctors, it is preferable that the idolater perform the circumcision rather than the Cuthean. These are the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Yehudah says: The Cuthean should perform the circumcision, not the idolater.

The *Gemora* answers: Switch the opinions. Rabbi Meir says: The Cuthean should perform the circumcision, not the idolater. Rabbi Yehudah says: The idolater should perform the circumcision, not the Cuthean. (28b – 29a)

### **INSIGHTS TO THE DAF**

#### ***The ridiculous results of Censorship***

Our forefathers suffered many tribulations from the Christians, the converts to Christianity and the slanderers to the point where *Chazal* ruled that "they were put down and not brought up". In other words, they should not be helped in their trouble and if one of them fell into a pit, he should not be helped out. Those who learn this *Gemora* wonder why it says, "**were** put down". Was this *halachah* not valid when the *Gemora* was being written? But this is one result of the censor, who changed all the holy books without exception and even changed the name of our tractate to '*Avodas Elilim* ("Idolatry").

*Amud* 26b is full of changes and eliminations, in the *Gemora* and in Rashi and Tosfos. *Goy* is replaced by *oved kochavim* ("a worshipper of stars"), *meshumad* by *mumar* ("a convert") and *avodah zarah* by *avodas kochavim umazalos* ("worship of stars and constellations"). As a result of these changes, we have the ridiculous statement in Tosfos (s.v. *Eizehu*): "...and **ovedei kochavim**, even though they all worship stars..." as if it could be that an

*oved kochavim* does not worship stars. The original statement was "...and gentiles (*goyim*), even though they all worship idolatry."

These errors result from the "genius" of the censors, most of who were ignorant and did not understand the text. Thus, for example, the *Gemora* in Avodah Zarah 4a says that if Hashem had been angry in Bilam's time, "there would have been no remnant of the haters of Israel." The *Gemora* means that there would not have been any remnant of Israel at all. The censor changed this to read, "there would have been no remnant of the **star-worshippers**, the haters of Israel".

Sometimes the censorship exceeded all imagination. In some *sidurim*, *Shomer goy kadosh* ("He who guards a holy people") was changed to *Shomer akum kadosh* ("He who guards holy worshippers of stars and constellations") and in a certain *Mishna* (Shabbos 6:5) *peiah nochrin* ("a wig from another's hair") was changed to *peiah akum* ("a wig from a worshipper of stars and constellations") (*He'akov Lemishor*, p. 19).

The censors also changed *halachah*. There are many examples but we shall focus on our *amud*. We learn that slanderers should be put down and not brought up. Who are the slanderers? Rashi and Tosfos explain that these are "liars who deliver the property of Jews to violent star-worshippers". The original text in Rashi was "slanderers who deliver the property of Jews to gentiles". This does not concern only liars or violent robbers.

**Self-sacrifice for safeguarding words of Torah:** This small example arouses a big question. The Maharshal (*Yam shel Shlomo*, Bava Kamma, Ch. 4, #9) rules that it is forbidden to change words of Torah because of danger and one must sacrifice oneself for that. He proves it from the *Gemora* (ibid) and rules that "we must sacrifice ourselves to sanctify His Name and someone who changes the *halachah* is as though he **denies Moshe's Torah**." We must therefore

understand how printers agreed to publish erroneous *halachos*. This question was asked of HaGaon Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l, who replied that we do not rule according to the Maharshal and the fact that leading authorities ignored the errors proves that the *halachah* is not according to his opinion (*He'akov Lemishor*, p. 34).

The Maharsham (*Da'as Torah*, 334:12) also writes that the author of Responsa *Yad Eliyahu* (48), who lived several generations after the Maharshal, strongly disagreed with him. We point out that this can be proven not only because of the silence of leading authorities. The *Meiri*, for instance, added dozens of "reservations" to his writings which were said only to satisfy the Christians (see *Tzefunos*, 1) and Rabeinu Yonah changed the meaning of a certain *Mishna* for fear of the government, as attested by the Rashbatz (*Magen Avos*, Avos 2:3).

## DAILY MASHAL

### *The Censor Didn't Understand*

The *poskim* rule that a Jewish doctor may cure a barren gentile woman lest the gentiles seek revenge, just as it is allowed to help a gentile woman to give birth, "and thus they attested about Ramban, who did so himself".

The *poskim* mention that Rabeinu Yonah disagreed and in his opinion, curing a barren gentile woman is worse than helping her to give birth and is forbidden. Furthermore, he wrote to Ramban: "You should be blessed, that you increase Amalek's offspring" (*Beis Yosef*, Y.D., end of 154).

How did Rabeinu Yonah's utterance survive the imposed censorship? The censor simply failed to understand that Rabeinu Yonah was just being sardonic...