

21 Adar 5778  
March 8, 2018



Avodah Zarah Daf 52

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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

### **Forbidden Idols**

The *braisa* had stated: The idol of a gentile is only forbidden once it has been worshipped; an idol made by a Jew is forbidden immediately.

The *Gemora* asks: But we explained the verse as referring to vessels and not to idols!?

The *Gemora* answers: The Torah juxtaposes the two: Just as vessels are not prohibited until they are used in worship, so their idols likewise are not prohibited until they are worshipped.

The *Gemora* notes: According to Rabbi Yishmael it is logical that the idol of a Jew is prohibited immediately: if when it belongs to an idolater it is not prohibited until it is worshipped, it stands to reason that when it belongs to a Jew it should be prohibited immediately.

The *Gemora* asks: But perhaps the idol of a Jew is not prohibited at all!?

The *Gemora* answers: Since it must be concealed, it obviously is prohibited.

The *Gemora* asks: But perhaps the idol of a Jew should be treated in the same way as the idol of an idolater!?

The *Gemora* cites a Scriptural verse regarding a Jewish idol which indicates that from the moment it was made the Jew bears a sin.

The *Gemora* asks: But let us conclude from these words that a man is guilty of sin when he makes an idol, but it is not prohibited until it is actually worshipped!?

The *Gemora* cites a Scriptural verse which indicates that from the moment it was made he comes under a curse.

The *Gemora* asks again: But perhaps it is not prohibited until it is actually worshipped!?

The *Gemora* answers: It is written: *An abomination of Hashem (this shows that it is forbidden for benefit).*

Rabbi Akiva (*who holds that it is not forbidden until it is worshipped*) explains this verse to mean that the idol is a thing that leads to an abomination.

Verse	Rabbi Akiva	Rabbi Yishmael
<i>The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire</i>	A gentile's idol becomes prohibited immediately	A gentile can nullify his god
<i>The carved images...you shall not covet...you shall take for yourself</i>	A gentile can nullify his god ( <i>if he covet it...you shall not covet; if he nullified it...you shall take for yourself</i> )	
<i>And place it in secret</i>	An idol of a Jew is prohibited once it is worshipped	An idol of a Jew must be permanently concealed

*You shall not plant for yourself any asheirah, any tree near the Altar*

Just as the Altar requires permanent concealment (*if it can't be used*), so too an idol of a Jew must be permanently concealed

(Rish Lakish) He who appoints an incompetent judge over the community is as if he had planted an *asheirah* in Israel.

(Rav Ashi) If such an appointment was made in a place where there are scholars, it is as if the *asheirah* was planted beside the Altar

(52a)

### ***Repairing a Vessel***

Rav Hamnuna inquired: What is the *halachah* if one repaired a broken vessel for the sake of idolatry?

The *Gemora* clarifies: If he is referring to the idol of an idolater, then both according to Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Akiva they are service vessels of idolatry, and service vessels of idolatry are not prohibited until they are used. He must be referring to the idol belonging to a Jew. Now according to Rabbi Akiva, since the idol itself is not prohibited until it is worshipped, can there be any question that its service vessels must first be used before they are prohibited? Rather, the inquiry must be according to Rabbi Yishmael who said that the idol of a Jew is prohibited immediately. This is his question: Do we compare the service vessels of a Jew's idol with the service vessels of a gentile's idol, and say that just as with the gentile's idol, the service vessels are not prohibited until they are used, so with the Jew's idol, the service vessels are not prohibited until they are used. Or do we compare them to the idol itself, and say that just as a Jew's idol is prohibited immediately, so also its service vessels are prohibited immediately?

The *Gemora* asks: But if this is what Rav Hamnuna meant to ask, why does he discuss a case where one repaired a vessel for the sake of idolatry? Let him inquire about one who made a vessel for the sake of idolatry!?

The *Gemora* offers a different interpretation of Rav Hamnuna's inquiry: The issue is regarding the restoration of old *tumah*. For we have learned in a *Mishna*: Regarding metal utensils - those which are flat and those which are formed as receptacles are susceptible to *tumah*. If they become broken, they lose their *tumah*, but if they are later repaired, they return to their former status of *tumah*. [*The same would apply regarding a service vessel for idolatry; if it was used for idolatry it becomes tamei; if it becomes broken, it loses its tumah.*] So Rav Hamnuna inquired: When its *tumah* returns, does it mean with respect to a Biblical *tumah* (*an ordinary case of tumah*), but it will not revert to a Rabbinical *tumah* (*such as the service vessels used for idolatry*); or perhaps there is no difference?

The *Gemora* asks: But if that were his intention, let him inquire with respect to the other Rabbinical *tumahs* (such as a vessel that became *tamei* through liquids)!?

The *Gemora* answers: [*In truth, he was inquiring about other cases as well; he specified this question for the following reason:*] His purpose was to ask one question based upon another, viz., Does Rabbinical *tumah* return or not? And if you conclude that it does not return, do the Rabbis consider the *tumah* caused by idolatry, on account of its severity, equal to Biblical *tumah*, or not?

The *Gemora* leaves this question unresolved. (52a)

### ***Food Offered to an Idol***

Rabbi Yochanan inquired of Rabbi Yannai: What is the *halachah* regarding food which was offered to an idol? Does nullification avail to purify them of their *tumah*, or not?

The *Gemora* notes that he did not inquire about service vessels used for idolatry, for there is no question regarding them – since for them there is purification by immersion in a *mikvah* (*by an*



ordinary *tumah*), so the *tumah* by idolatry can likewise be nullified.

The *Gemora* asks: Why didn't he pose his question with respect to food themselves which were the object of idolatrous worship!?

The *Gemora* answers: He did not pose his question with respect to food themselves which were the object of idolatrous worship because when its prohibition is nullified, its *tumah* is likewise nullified. His inquiry was with reference to food that was offered to an idol. Shall we say that since its prohibition cannot be nullified according to Rav Giddal (who ruled that offerings cannot be nullified), its *tumah* cannot be nullified either; or perhaps, though what is prohibited by the Torah cannot be nullified, its *tumah*, which is merely a Rabbinical ordinance, can be nullified?

The *Gemora* leaves this question unresolved. (52a – 52b)

### **Temple of Chonyo**

Rabbi Yosi ben Shaul inquired of Rebbe: May utensils which were used in the Temple of Chonyo be used in the Beis Hamikdash? [*The Gemora (Menachos 109b) records the story of Shimon Hatzaddik, the great Kohen Gadol, who, nearing death, instructed his younger son, Chonyo, to take over as Kohen Gadol. Soon thereafter, an incident occurred, which forced him to flee to Alexandria, Egypt. Once there, Chonyo built a temple, an altar and offered sacrifices there unlawfully.*]

The *Gemora* notes: This inquiry follows the view of the one who said that the Temple of Chonyo was not an idolatrous temple (for if it was, the vessels would certainly be prohibited); for we have learned in a *Mishna*: The *Kohanim* who served in the Temple of Chonyo may not serve in the Temple which is in Yerushalayim, and it is unnecessary to state that *Kohanim* who served idolatry are disqualified. [*The Mishna distinguishes between serving in the Temple of Chonyo and serving idolatry.*]

The *Gemora* clarifies the inquiry: Were the *Kohanim* penalized by the Rabbis because they were cognitive beings (*who acted unlawfully*), but they did not penalize the utensils, or perhaps there is no difference and the utensils are also disqualified?

Rebbe replied to him: They are prohibited and there was a Scriptural text upon which to support this ruling but we have forgotten it.

Rabbi Yosi ben Shaul questioned him from Scriptural verses which seem to indicate that utensils which Achaz used for idolatry (*although Biblically they cannot be prohibited for benefit, for he could not prohibit the Temple's vessels, for they did not belong to him*) could be restored to purity and used in the Temple by consecrating them with the anointing oil (so certainly there was no Rabbinic penalty on those vessels used at the Temple of Chonyo).

Rebbe said to him: May you be blessed to the heavens, for you have restored my loss to me! The explanation of the verse means that they stored those vessels away permanently, and they sanctified others in their stead.

The *Gemora* cites a *Mishna* to support Rebbe's viewpoint: In the Northeastern chamber, the Hasmoneans permanently concealed the Altar-stones which the Greeks had defiled; and Rav Sheishes explained: They defiled them through idolatry. [*Although these stones, as property of the Temple, could not be Biblically forbidden, based upon the principle that no one can render prohibited anything that is not his, the Rabbis decreed that it must be permanently concealed. The same should apply to the utensils in the Temple of Chonyo.*]

Rav Pappa rejects the proof: There they found a Scriptural verse and expounded it (*to forbid the stones on a Biblical level*), for it is written: *And lawless people entered the Sanctuary and profaned it. [The vessels lost their sanctity when the idolaters entered the Sanctuary; they were no longer regarded as the property of the Temple and when the Greeks used them for idolatry, they became forbidden even for secular use.]*



When the Hasmoneans recaptured the Temple, they said: What shall we do with the Altar-stones? If we have them broken (*in order to nullify their prohibited status, and then use them for a new Altar*), the Torah stated that the Altar-stones must be built from whole stones. If we chisel them afterwards (*so the stones should be complete*), the Torah stated that no iron tools should be used upon them!

The *Gemora* asks: But why did they not break the stones and take them for their own private use? Did Rav Oshaya not say: The Rabbis wished to conceal all the silver and gold in the world on account of the silver and gold plundered from the Sanctuary of Yerushalayim; and this was challenged: Is Yerushalayim the majority of the world? Abaye explained: The Rabbis wished to conceal every Hadrianic and Trajanic *dinar* which had become worn by use because it was coined from gold captured from Yerushalayim (*which was used in the Temple*) until they discovered a verse of the Torah which taught that it was permitted: *And lawless people entered the Sanctuary and profaned it. [Just as the coins became permitted, the stones should be permitted for mundane use as well!?!]*

The *Gemora* answers: By the case of the coins, they had not been used for the service of the Most High, but in the case of the Altar-stones, since they had been used for the Most High, it would not be proper to be used for a secular use. (52b)

### **Mishna**

An idolater can nullify his own idolatry or that of another idolater, but a Jew cannot nullify the idolatry of an idolater. He who nullifies an idol nullifies its accessories as well. If he nullifies its accessories, the accessories are permitted, but the idol is still prohibited. (52b)

### **Idol Nullification**

Rebbe taught this *Mishna* to Rabbi Shimon, his son as follows: An idolater can nullify his own idolatry or that of another idolater.

Rabbi Shimon responded: My teacher, you taught us in your youth that an idolater can nullify his own idolatry or that of a Jew. The *Gemora* explains the case to be one where a non-Jew is a partner in the idol (*and it can therefore be nullified*).

The *Gemora* asks: What did he hold when he was young, and what did he hold when he was old?

The *Gemora* answers: When he was young he held that the Jew worshipped the idol based upon the mindset of the idolater, so that when the idolater nullified it for himself he nullified it also for the Jew. When he was older, however, he held that the Jew worshipped it upon his own mindset, so that when the idolater nullified it, he did so for himself, but not for the Jew. (52b)

### **INSIGHTS TO THE DAF**

#### ***A Matzeivah Monument in a Beis Din***

Our *sugya* says that if one appoints an unsuitable *dayan*, it is as if he plants an *asheirah* (a tree worshiped as an idol) and if he appoints him where there are *talmidei chachamim*, it is as if he plants an *asheirah* next to the altar.

The *Ritva* explains the connection between an unsuitable *dayan* and idolatry in that the *Shechinah* is present in a *beis din*, as we are told: "Hashem is present in a congregation of the L-rd" (Tehillim 82:1). An unsuitable *dayan* drives away the *Shechinah* and is thus like an idol. A *talmid chacham* is like the altar, which atones sins, and appointing an unsuitable *dayan* among *talmidei chachamim* is like erecting an idol next to the altar.

If we examine Rambam (*Hilchos Sanhedrin*, 3:8), we find that he compares appointing an unsuitable *dayan* to the prohibition of "you shall not erect a **matzeivah** (monument)" whereas he only compares appointing an unsuitable person among *talmidei chachamim* to planting an **asheirah** next to the altar.

The *Maharik* (*Responsa*, 117) explains that in Rambam's opinion, both prohibitions hint at appointing an unsuitable *dayan*. Sometimes a person is appointed who doesn't know right from left and sits in the *beis din* like a stone monument.





Other times a person is wanted for his knowledge, though he does not fear Hashem and may be swayed by bribery. Such a person is wanted for the fruit of his wisdom and resembles an *asheirah*, which bears iniquitous fruit.

### **Rendering Chametz Insignificant in a Pile of Matzos!**

A few decades ago a book was published called *Michtevei Torah*. It contains 290 letters between the Rogatchover Gaon, author of *Tzafnas Pa'neiach*, and a *gaon* of Warsaw by the name of Rav Mordechai Kalina, treating all manner of issues.

**Must one get rid of the substance of the *chametz* or can one make it halachically insignificant:** Among other matters, the *geonim* discuss whether one can fulfill the *mitzvah* of “*tashbisu*” – to destroy *chametz* on *erev Pesach*, by mixing it with *matzah*, such that the *chametz* is rendered insignificant (*batel b'rov*). The doubt is whether the **substance** of the *chametz* must be gotten rid of or whether it can be made *batel* – **halachically insignificant**.

Rav Kalina writes in letter 108 that by extirpating the ***din*** of *chametz* by making it *batel*, one can observe the *mitzvah* of “*tashbisu*”, and proves the same from the *halachos* pertaining to idolatry. It is a *mitzvah* to destroy idol-worship, as we are told: “you shall surely destroy” (Devarim 12:2) and in *Eretz Yisroel* it is even a *mitzvah* to seek them out and eradicate them. However, we find in *Avodah Zarah* 43a that Rabbi Elazar HaKapar forced a gentile to make ***batel*** idolatry from an object and thus extirpate its prohibition, without destroying it. Although we may say that this concerns outside *Eretz Yisroel*, Rashi writes that the same applies to *Eretz Yisroel*.

## **DAILY MASHAL**

### **Deriving Benefit from Haman**

The Chemdas Ephraim writes that although Abaye holds that one who worships idols out of love or fear of someone is liable, nevertheless, if he nullifies the idol or decides that it is not an

idol any longer, it will remove the prohibition against deriving any pleasure from it.

The novelty of this ruling is that our *Gemora* rules that an idol worshipped by a Jew cannot be nullified. He explains why here it is different. The *Ritva* writes why there is a distinction between an idolater who worships idols - that he can nullify it, but a Jew is unable to. This is because when a Jew worships idols, he is drawn after it much more than an idolater. Accordingly, in a case when he is serving the idol merely out of love or fear of someone, he is not drawn after it at all and he is therefore able to nullify it.

Based on this, he answers a question the Teshkinover Rav, in *Beis Avraham*, asks: Why do we not derive from the incident with Haman and Mordechai that a living being that is served as an *avodah zarah* is not forbidden to benefit from? For Haman made himself into an *avodah zarah*, and a Jew that worships an idol is not able to nullify it. And, nevertheless, we find that Mordechai did utilize him when he desired to ascend the horse. This proves that a living being that was served as an idol is not forbidden to benefit from!?

He answers that the Jews did not worship Haman willingly; it was out of fear of him, and therefore the *avodah zarah* could be nullified. And even the idolaters who served Haman also nullified him, for when Achashverosh instructed Haman to take the royal garments and horse etc., they realized that he should not be served and they nullified him. This is why Mordechai was able to derive benefit from Haman.