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Avodah Zarah Daf 54

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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

A Tanna taught: If a man worshipped [an animal] which is his own it is prohibited; but if it belonged to another it is permitted. Against this I quote: Which [animal is considered to have been] worshipped? Any which was worshipped, whether inadvertently or deliberately, whether under compulsion or voluntarily. How is the term ‘under compulsion’ to be understood? Is it not, e.g., when a man took his neighbor's animal by force and worshipped it? — Rami bar Chama said: No, it is, e.g., when idol worshipers brought pressure to bear upon a man and he worshipped his own animal.

[To this interpretation] Rabbi Zeira objected: But the Merciful One absolves anyone who acts under pressure, as it is written: But unto the damsel you shall do nothing!

Rather, said Rava, all were included in the general law: *Nor shall you serve them*; so when Scripture specifies: *and by which he shall live*, i.e., and not die through them, it excludes the man who acts under pressure. After that, however, the Merciful One wrote: *And you shall not desecrate My holy Name* — i.e., not even under compulsion! How is it, then? — The former refers to an act in private, the latter to an act in public.

The Rabbis said to Rava: There is a teaching which supports your view, viz.: Idolatrous pedestals [set up] in a time of religious persecution are not nullified even when the persecution is over.

He said to them: If it is on that account, [the teaching you quote] gives no support to my view, for the reason that

perhaps there was an apostate who worshipped at it voluntarily!

Rav Ashi said: Do not use the word ‘perhaps,’ but there certainly was an Israelite, an apostate, who worshipped voluntarily.

Chizkiyah said: For instance, he poured wine unto an idol upon the horns of [his neighbor's animal].

[To this explanation] Rav Adda bar Ahavah objected: Can this be considered [an animal] which is worshipped? [In such circumstances the animal] is merely a pedestal and is permitted!

Rather, said Rav Adda bar Ahavah: it is, e.g., a case where he poured wine between the horns of [his neighbor's animal] in which case he performed on it an act [of worship].

This is in accord with what Ulla reported in the name of Rabbi Yochanan when he came [from Eretz Yisroel]: Although they declare that he who worships his neighbor's animal does not render it prohibited, still if he performed on it an act [of idolatrous worship] he rendered it prohibited.

Rav Nachman said [to the Rabbis]: Go, tell Ulla that Rav Huna has already expounded this thy teaching in Babylon! For Rav Huna said: If the animal of his neighbor was lying in front of an idol, as soon as he cut one of its neck-veins he has rendered it prohibited.

From where have we derived that he rendered it prohibited? If I answer from the Kohanim (whom the Rabbis forbade to serve in the Temple after they officiated in houses of idolatry), it is different with Kohanim because they are rational beings; and if [I answer that it may be derived] from the altar-stones, perhaps it is as Rav Pappa explained! — Rather [must it be derived] from the Sanctuary vessels; for it is written: *All the vessels, which king Achaz in his reign did cast away when he trespassed, have we prepared and sanctified*, and a master declared: ‘Have we prepared’ means that we have stored them away, and ‘sanctified’ means that we have substituted others for them. But [there is the rule that] a man cannot render prohibited that which is not his property! Since, however, an act [of idolatrous worship] was performed on them [king Chizkiyah and his followers] declared them prohibited for themselves. — Similarly here [with the animal] since he performed an act [of idolatrous worship] on it, he has rendered it prohibited.

When Rav Dimi came [from Eretz Yisroel] he reported in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: Although [the Rabbis] declared that he who worships a piece of ground does not render it prohibited, yet if he dug in it wells, pits or caves he has rendered it prohibited.

When Rav Shmuel ben Yehudah came [from Eretz Yisroel] he reported that Rabbi Yochanan said: Although [the Rabbis] declared that he who worships animate beings has not rendered them prohibited, if he obtained them in exchange for an idol he has rendered them prohibited.

When Ravin came [from Eretz Yisroel] he said: On this point Rabbi Yishmael son of Rabbi Yosi and the Rabbis are at variance. One said that the animals obtained in exchange for an idol are prohibited but the animals obtained in exchange for these are permitted; while the other says that even these are prohibited. What is the reason of the one who says that even these are prohibited? — Scripture states: *And you will become banned like it*, i.e., whatever you bring into being from [a banned thing] is to be treated like it. [What is the

reason of] the other? — Scripture states: [For] *it* [is a banned thing] — it [is a banned thing] but not what is obtained as the result of a double exchange. [How does] the second authority [explain this phrase]? — He requires it for the exclusion of orlah and the mixed plantings of a vineyard, so that if he sold them and with the proceeds married a wife she is legally married. [Why does] the first authority [not explain the word *it* similarly]? Because orlah and the mixed plantings of a vineyard do not require to be specially excluded, since in connection with idolatry and the Shemittah year we have two texts which have an identical purpose, and the rule is: We draw no deduction when two texts have an identical purpose.

Regarding idolatry it is as we have stated. Regarding the Shemittah year, it is written: *For it is a jubilee, it shall be holy to you* — as the holiness affects the redemption money and is prohibited, similarly the Shemittah year [described as holy like the Sanctuary] affects its money and is prohibited.

If [this conclusion is correct], then as the holiness affects its redemption money and [the object which is redeemed] becomes non-holy, similarly the Shemittah year should affect its money and [the produce which had been sold] become non-holy! But there is a text to state: *It shall be* [holy], i.e., it shall remain in that state. How is it, then? If he bought meat with fruits grown in the seventh year, both must be ‘removed’ during the Shemittah year. But if he bought fish with that meat, the meat ceases to be holy and the fish becomes holy; if he then bought wine with the fish, the fish ceases to be holy and the wine becomes holy; if he then bought oil with the wine, the wine ceases to be holy and the oil becomes holy. How is it, then? It is the last thing [in the series of exchanges] which is affected by the Shemittah year and the fruit itself is prohibited.

What, however, of the second authority? — He holds that we do draw a deduction when two texts have an identical purpose, and [the phrase ‘for it is a devoted thing’] is

required for the exclusion [of orlah and the mixed plantings of a vineyard, as explained above].

MISHNAH. The elders (Jewish sages) in Rome were asked (by non-Jewish philosophers): If [your god] has no desire for idolatry, why does he not abolish it? They replied: If it was something unnecessary to the world that was worshipped, he would abolish it; but people worship the sun, moon, stars and planets; should He destroy his universe on account of fools! They said [to the elders]: If so, he should destroy what is unnecessary for the world and leave what is necessary for the world! They replied: [if he did that], we should merely be strengthening the hands of the worshipers of these, because they would say, “be sure that these are deities, for behold they have not been abolished!”

GEMARA. Our Rabbis taught: Philosophers asked the elders in Rome: If your God has no desire for idolatry, why does He not abolish it? They replied: If it was something of which the world has no need that was worshipped, He would abolish it; but people worship the sun, moon, stars and planets; should He destroy the universe on account of fools! The world pursues its natural course, and as for the fools who act wrongly, they will have to render an account.

Another illustration: Suppose a man stole a measure of wheat and went and sowed it in the ground; it is right that it should not grow, but the world pursues its natural course and as for the fools who act wrongly, they will have to render an account.

Another illustration: Suppose a man cohabits with his neighbor's wife; it is right that she should not conceive, but the world pursues its natural course and as for the fools who act wrongly, they will have to render an account.

This is similar to what Rish Lakish said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, declared: Not enough that the wicked put My coinage to vulgar use, but they also trouble Me and compel Me to seal with it!

A philosopher asked Rabban Gamliel: It is written in your Torah: For Hashem, your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. Why, however, is He so jealous of its worshippers rather than of the idol itself? He replied: I will give you a parable: To what is the matter like? To a human king who had a son, and this son reared a dog to which he attached his father's name, so that whenever he took an oath he exclaimed, “By the life of this dog, my father!” When the king hears of it, with whom is he angry — his son or the dog? Surely he is angry with his son! [The philosopher] said to him: You call the idol a dog; but there is some reality in it. [The Rabbi asked]: What is your proof? He replied: Once a fire broke out in our city, and the whole town was burnt with the exception of a certain idolatrous shrine! He said to him: I will give you a parable: To what is the matter like? To a human king against whom one of his provinces rebelled. If he goes to war against it, does he fight with the living or the dead? Surely he wages war with the living! [The philosopher] said to him: You call the idol a dog and you call it a dead thing. In that case, let Him destroy it from the world! He replied: If it was something unnecessary to the world that was worshipped, He would abolish it; but people worship the sun and moon, stars and planets, brooks and valleys. Should He destroy His universe on account of fools! And thus it states: *Am I utterly to consume all things from off the face of the ground, said Hashem; am I to consume man and beast; am I to consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, even the stumbling-blocks of the wicked!* — i.e., because the wicked stumble over these things is He to destroy them from the world? Do they not worship the human being; so am I to cut off man from off the face of the ground!