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Avodah Zarah Daf 51

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Sticks and Stones

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: If an idol is worshipped by shaking a stick before it, and someone broke a stick before the idol, he is liable (*to death*), but if he threw a stick in front of it he is exempt (*from death*).

Abaye said to Rava: Why is it different when he broke the stick? It is because it resembles the slaughtering of an animal in the Temple. Then if one threw a stick he should also be liable, for it resembles the sprinkling of the blood in the Temple service!?

Rava replied: We require a sprinkling which is broken up (*like the blood*), and that we do not have here.

Abaye asks from a *braisa*: If he offered to the idol excrement (*by smearing it on the idol's face*) or poured out before it a vessel from a urinal, he is liable. Now it is clear why he is liable if he poured before it a vessel from a urinal because it is similar to a sprinkling which is broken up; but where is there a sprinkling which is broken up with excrement?

Rava answers: The *braisa* is referring to moist excrement.

The *Gemora* asks: Let us say that Rav's statement (*differentiating between breaking and throwing a stick before an idol*) is actually an argument between *Tannaim*. The *braisa* states: If someone slaughtered a grasshopper before an idol, Rabbi Yehudah says he is liable to be killed, while the Sages say he is not. What is their argument? It must be that Rabbi Yehudah says one needs to merely slaughter (*whether a grasshopper or a stick, as stated by Rav*) to an idol to be killed, and the Sages hold that one needs to slaughter as one

slaughtered in the Temple (*and grasshoppers were never offered as sacrifices in the Beis Hamikdash*).

The *Gemora* answers: No. Everyone agrees that slaughtering is not enough, and that one must slaughter as one slaughtered in the Temple. However, being that a grasshopper's neck is like the neck of an animal, Rabbi Yehudah holds this is like the slaughtering of the Temple. [*According to Rashi, at this point the Gemora understands that these Tannaim argue on Rav.*]

Rav Nachman in the name of Rabbah bar Avuha says in the name of Rav: If one serves an idol with a stick - if he breaks a stick in front of it he is liable to death, and the stick is forbidden from benefit. If he merely throws the stick, he is liable to death but the stick is not forbidden.

Rava asked Rav Nachman: Why does breaking a stick make the stick forbidden? It must be because it is akin to slaughtering. Throwing a stick is akin to sprinkling the blood in the Temple service, and therefore should cause the stick to be forbidden from benefit!?

Rav Nachman answered: We require a sprinkling which is broken up (*like the blood*), and this does not occur when throwing a stick.

Rava countered: If so, why should stones thrown at *markulis* (*an idol worshipped by throwing stones at it*) be forbidden from benefit?

Rav Nachman replied: I also had this question, and asked Rabbah bar Avuha, who asked Chiya bar Rav, who asked Rav. Rav answered: The stones thrown at *markulis* enlarge the idol itself.

Rava asks: This is understandable according to the opinion that an idol of a gentile becomes forbidden once it is created. However, how can we understand this according to the opinion that it is only forbidden once it is worshipped? [The entire pile should be permitted, for they never offer anything to the stones; rather, they are merely enlarging the idol!?!]

Rav Nachman answers: Each stone becomes part of the idol and is a sacrifice to the stones before it (*it does not have the law of a sacrifice, for it does not resemble the Temple service; it is, however, enough of a sacrifice that it causes the previous stones to become forbidden*).

Rava asks: The last stone should then be permitted (*for it was never served*)!?

Rav Nachman answers: If you know which one is the last stone, you can go and take it!

Rav Ashi says: Each stone is a sacrifice for itself and for those before it (*this is the way it is designated and forbidden*).

The *Mishna* had stated: If one found on the head of an idol clothes, money, or vessels, they are permitted. If he found crowns of grape clusters or wheat stalks, wine, oil, flour, and anything else brought on the altar of the Temple, they are forbidden.

The *Gemora* asks: Wine, oil, and flour are understandable, as they are brought in the Temple and are broken up (*in droplets or pieces*) when used. However, clusters of grapes and wheat stalks are neither used in the Temple, nor broken up!?

Rava answers in the name of Ulla: The case is where he harvested them for this purpose. [The harvesting is akin to slaughtering.] (50b – 51a)

Idol Worship in a Different Manner

Rabbi Avahu says in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: How do we know that if someone slaughters a blemished animal to an idol that he does not receive the death penalty? The verse says: *One who sacrifices to idols will be destroyed - only to Hashem alone*. The Torah only forbade slaughtering as is done in the Temple (*not a blemished animal*).

Rava asked: What is the blemish being discussed? If it is a small cataract in the animal's eye, why shouldn't he be killed? If it is worthy to be served as a sacrifice for Noahides (*who are sacrificing to Hashem*), it should make one liable for serving idols! Rather, it must be referring to an animal missing a limb, and as stated by Rabbi Elozar. Rabbi Elozar says: How do we know that an animal that is missing a limb cannot be brought as a *korban* (to Hashem) by a gentile? The verse says: *From all of the living (animals), from all flesh, two from each etc.* The Torah indicated that one must bring a *korban* from an animal whose limbs are alive (*i.e. intact*).

The *Gemora* asks: But this verse is needed to teach us that an animal which is a *tereifah* (*an animal with a physical defect that will cause its death; it is forbidden to be eaten even if it was slaughtered properly*) should not be brought into the Ark!?

The *Gemora* answers: This is derived from the verse: *to keep seed alive (for a tereifah cannot beget offspring)*.

The *Gemora* asks: This is true only according to the opinion that a *tereifah* cannot give birth, but according to the opinion who holds that a *tereifah* can give birth, what is there to say?

The *Gemora* answers: It may be derived from the verse: (*Noach was commanded to take animals into the Ark to be alive with you – this means that they should be similar to you (and since Noach wasn't a tereifah, he should not bring in an animal that is a tereifah; for although they give birth, they are not healthy, and not so fit for the continuance of the world)*).

The *Gemora* asks: But perhaps Noach himself was a *tereifah*?

The *Gemora* answers: That cannot be, for it is written regarding Noach that he was *complete*.

The *Gemora* asks: But perhaps the Torah means that he was “complete” in his conduct with people?

The *Gemora* answers: That is known from the fact that it is written about him that he was *righteous*.

The *Gemora* asks: But perhaps the Torah means that he was “complete” in his conduct, and “righteous” in his deeds?

The *Gemora* answers: Noach could not have been a *tereifah*, for if Noach was indeed a *tereifah*, would the Torah have instructed him take in animals similarly affected, and keep out the whole ones (*what would be the logic in that*)?

The *Gemora* asks: Now that we derive this from the verse *with you*, why do we need the phrase *to keep seed alive*?

The *Gemora* answers: *With you* might have meant that he should bring in animals that would just keep him company, even if they are old or sterile (*and cannot give birth*), therefore the Torah stated *to keep seed alive* (*to indicate to us that the purpose of bringing in these animals was to repopulate the world, and therefore, old and sterile animals would also be excluded*). (51a)

Sacrificing to Markulis

Rabbi Elozar says: From where do we know that if one sacrificed an animal to *markulis*, he is liable to punishment? It is from the verse: *And they shall no more slaughter their sacrifices to demons*. Since this is redundant in respect of the normal worship of slaughtering, for this is derived from the verse, “*How do these nations serve their gods*,” it should be applied to a case where slaughtering is not the usual practice.

The *Gemora* asks: Do we require this verse for this teaching? Don’t we need it for that which was taught in the following *braisa*: The verses before this verse (*And they will no longer etc.*)

discussed people who dedicated and brought sacrifices during a time when it is forbidden to sacrifice on private altars. Their punishment is stated by the verse: *And to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting they did not bring it etc.* While we see a verse stating a punishment, where do we see the verse that warns about not doing this? [*Typically, two separate verses are needed.*] The verse states: *lest you bring up your olah offerings*. This is as Rabbi Avin says in the name of Rabbi I’la: Whenever the Torah states *guard, lest, or do not*, it refers to a negative prohibition. This verse (*And they will no longer etc.*) discusses people who dedicated sacrifices during a time when it was permitted to sacrifice on private altars, and brought them when it was forbidden to sacrifice on private altars. This is as the verse says: *In order that the Children of Israel will bring their sacrifices that they slaughter etc.* This implies that the sacrifices were originally permitted, and then brought *upon the open field*. This teaches us that whoever sacrifices on a private altar when it is forbidden to do so, is considered like he is sacrificing upon the open field (*to false gods*). *And they will bring them to Hashem* refers to a positive *mitzvah* (*to only bring these korbanos to the Beis Hamikdash*). How do we know there is also a negative prohibition regarding sacrificing privately when it is forbidden? The verse says: *And they will no longer slaughter their sacrifices etc.* One might think this is punishable by *kares*. This is why the verse teaches: *This will be a law for them forever*. This implies it is only a positive and negative prohibition, and not punishable with *kares*. [*Our question therefore is how Rabbi Elozar can use the verse “And they will no longer etc.” when the braisa already uses it for a different teaching.*]

Rava answers: Both teachings can be derived, as one can read the verse as saying *they will not slaughter, and they will no longer*. This implies two separate prohibitions. (51a – 51b)

Mishna

If one found on the head of an idol clothes, money, or vessels, they are permitted. If he found crowns of grape clusters or wheat stalks, wine, oil, flour, and anything else brought on the altar of the Temple, they are forbidden. (51b)



Adornment to an Idol

The *Gemora* asks: How do we know this?

Rav Chiya bar Yosef says in the name of Rav Oshiya: One verse say: *And you saw their abominations and their detestable things – the wood, stone, gold, and silver that are with them.* Another verse says: *do not covet the gold and silver that is on them.* How can we explain the omission of stone and wood in the second verse? It must be that *with them* is compared to *on them*. Just as what is on them is only forbidden if it is something that beautifies the idol, so too what is with them is only forbidden if it is something of this sort. [*This teaches that the stone or wood is only forbidden if it is for beautification, as opposed to support or other reasons.*]

The *Gemora* asks: Why don't we say that *on them* should be compared to *with them*? Just as *with them* indicates anything that is with them (*even stone or wood*), so too *on them* should include anything!?

The *Gemora* answers: If so, the entire verse of *on them* is extra (*as it should just say the verse regarding stone and wood, and we would know that anything is included*).

The *Gemora* asks: Money is used for beautification!? [*The Mishna states that money on an idol is permitted!*]

In Rabbi Yannai's academy they answered: The case is where there is a purse that is tied on the neck of the idol (*with money in it; since it is not visible, it is obviously not there for adornment*).

The *Gemora* asks: Clothes are used for beautification!? [*The Mishna states that clothes on an idol is permitted!*]

In Rabbi Yanai's academy they answered: The case is where there are clothes folded up and placed on top of its head (*in an unflattering manner*).

The *Gemora* asks: Vessels are used for beautification!? [*The Mishna states that vessels on an idol are permitted!*]

Rav Pappa says: The case is where there is a large washing trough overturned on top of its head.

Rav Assi bar Chiya says: Whatever is inside the curtain (*that separates the idol from other items*) is forbidden, even if it is merely salt and water. Whatever is outside this curtain is only forbidden if it is something that is clearly used for beautification.

Rabbi Yosi ben Chanina says: This law (*regarding the curtain*) does not apply to *Pe'or* or *markulis*.

The *Gemora* asks: What does he mean? If he means that whatever is inside is like it is outside, how can this be? If they defecate in front of it, they certainly would worship it with salt and water! Rather, it must be that even things outside the curtain are like things inside the wall (*and everything around them is therefore forbidden; for these idols are not worshipped in a dignified manner, and therefore, there is no need to conceal its worship from the eyes of people*). (51b)

Mishna

If a garden or bathhouse is associated with an idol, one can benefit from these items without paying money, but not if he has to pay. If it was jointly owned by the idol (*i.e. church*) and others, one can benefit from it even if he has to pay. If a gentile makes an idol it is forbidden from benefit immediately. If a Jew makes an idol, it is only forbidden once it is worshipped. (51b)

Idol Benefit

Abaye says: The paying forbidden in the *Mishna* is paying money towards the priests of the idol, not towards its worshippers.

Some say that Abaye is referring to the second part of the *Mishna*. If it was jointly owned by the idol (*i.e. church*) and others, one can benefit from it "for good and not for good," which apparently means "even if he has to pay." However, Abaye says: "For good" means even if it benefits those who are the worshippers, and "not for good" means it cannot benefit the



priests. This version would certainly hold that in the first case of the *Mishna* the priests certainly cannot benefit. However, the first version of Abaye's statement would apparently indicate that even if the priests benefit in the second case, it is still permitted to pay money, being that others also benefit from this money.

The *Mishna* says: If a gentile makes an idol it is forbidden from benefit immediately.

The *Gemora* asks: Who is our *Mishna* according to?

The *Gemora* answers: It is according to Rabbi Akiva. The *braisa* states: *You shall surely destroy all of the places that the gentiles worshipped there.* This indicates vessels used to serve idols. One might think that if they made a vessel but did not finish it, finished it but did not bring it to the idol, or brought it and did not use it that they still have to be destroyed. This is why the verse continues, *that the gentiles worshipped there*, indicating that they must have been used in service. Rabbi Yishmael says: This is the source for the law that while the idol of a gentile is only forbidden once it has been worshipped, an idol made by a Jew is forbidden immediately. Rabbi Akiva says: The opposite is true. If a gentile makes an idol it is forbidden from benefit immediately. If a Jew makes an idol, it is only forbidden once it is worshipped. (51b)

INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

Candles that were Lit for Idols

The Ramban cites those who say that the candles cannot be nullified, for they are considered as offerings to an idol, which cannot be nullified. This is because they melt and "break apart." Accordingly, they are similar to the slaughtering of an animal - which becomes broken, and is therefore forbidden.

The Ramban himself disagrees with this and maintains that lighting candles before an idol is not compared to slaughtering or to breaking a stick before it. His rationale is as follows: regarding breaking the stick, one's intention is to worship the

idol through the act of breaking; however, one who lights candles before an idol does not have intention to serve the idol through the melting of the wax - but rather, it is with the act of lighting. This is not considered serving through "breaking."

Furthermore he writes that lighting candles does not resemble a service in the Temple, for although they lit the *Menorah*, that is not regarded as a service, for only the four services are called a service.

He concludes that the candles are forbidden as adornments to the idol, and therefore nullification is effective. Once the priests extinguish them, or give them to a Jew, they are permitted.

DAILY MASHAL

Cursed for the Present and the Future

All the "curseds" in Devarim appear in the present tense, such as "Cursed is he who breaches a boundary", "...who misleads a blind person", "...who dishonors his father", etc. The only exception is "Cursed is the person who will make an idol", which appears in the future tense. The reason is that Hashem punishes a person both for his thought and his action only in the sin of idolatry. Therefore, such a person is punished both for his present thought and his future action (Toras Chayim, Chulin 142b).