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Avodah Zarah Daf 17

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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

Heresy and Immorality

The *braisa* states: When Rabbi Eliezer was arrested by idolaters to try to force him to serve idols, they brought him to a building used to judge capital offenses. A Roman official told him: A wise man like you deals in such things?! Rabbi Eliezer replied: I trust the judge. The judge thought that he was saying that he trusts him, and so he let him go. He in fact was thinking about Hashem (*the true judge*). The judge said: Being that you have made me trusted by you, I swear by Deimus (*his idol*) that you are exempt. When he returned home, his disciples called on him to console him (*for he could not identify the sin that caused this to happen*), but he would accept no consolation. Rabbi Akiva said to him: Master, will you permit me to say one thing of what you have taught me? He replied: Yes. Rabbi Akiva said to him: Master, perhaps some teaching of heresy had been transmitted to you and it pleased you, and because of that you were arrested? Rabbi Eliezer exclaimed: Akiva you have reminded me! I was once walking in the upper market of Tzippori when I came across a heretic, and Yaakov of Kefar Sechaniah was his name, who said to me: It is written in your Torah: *You shall not bring the hire of a harlot ... into the house of Hashem your God. May such money be applied to the lavatory for the Kohen Gadol?* I did not reply to him. He said to me: I was taught as follows by my master: *For they were gathered from the hire of a harlot and they will revert to the hire of a harlot - they came from a place of filth, let them go to a place of filth.* Those words pleased me very much, and this heresy is why I was arrested; for thereby I transgressed the scriptural words: *Distance your way far from her* - which refers to *minus* – heresy, - *and do not come near to the door of her house* - which refers to the authority.

There are some who apply the verse: *Distance your way far from her* to heresy as well as to the authority, and, *and do not come near to the door of her house* to a harlot. And how far is one to keep away from her door? Rav Chisda said: Four cubits.

The *Gemora* asks: And to what do the Rabbis (*who did not accept the heretic’s interpretation*) apply the verse: *the hire of a harlot*?

The *Gemora* answers: It is applied to the saying of Rav Chisda. For Rav Chisda said: Every harlot who allows herself to be hired will at the end have to hire herself, as it is written: *And in that you gave a hire, and a hire was not given to you, thus you have become reversed.*

This, the *Gemora* notes, is contrary to what Rabbi Pedas said, for Rabbi Pedas said: The Torah forbade only the closeness of physical intimacy (*and not four amos*), as it is written: *Every man shall not approach to any close relative to him to uncover their nakedness.*

The *Gemora* records that Ulla would kiss his sisters on their bosoms or on their hands, but Ulla himself is of the opinion that a man must not have any closeness to a woman who is forbidden to him. This is based on the principle that we tell a *nazir*, who has taken a vow not to drink wine, “Go around and do not come near the vineyard.”

It is written: *Alukah (Gehinnom) has two daughters that say, “Give, give.”* Mar Ukva said: This refers to the voice of the two daughters who cry from Gehinnom calling to this world, “Bring, bring!” And who are they? Heresy (*calling out for sacrifices for idolatry*) and the Government (*calling out for gifts*).



And there are those who say: Rav Chisda said in the name of Mar Ukva: It is the voice of Gehinnom crying and saying, "Bring me the two daughters who cry (*from other punishments*) and say in this world, "Bring, bring."

The *Gemora* expounds a verse to mean that heretics usually do not repent in this world, and if they do manage to repent, they die quickly.

The *Gemora* asks: Does it mean then that those who repent from heresy die? Was there not that woman who came before Rav Chisda confessing to him (*wishing to repent*) that the lightest sin that she committed was that her younger son was made from her older son (*by cohabiting with him*)? Rav Chisda said: Get busy in preparing her shrouds (*for her imminent death*), but she did not die. Now, since she refers to her act of incest as the lightest sin, it may be assumed that she also had heresy in her (*and yet she did not die*)!?

The *Gemora* answers: She did not altogether repent from her heresy, and that is why she did not die.

Others reported the above discussion as follows: Is it only from heresy that one dies immediately if one repents, but not from sins of immorality? Was there not that woman who came before Rav Chisda (*confessing to him wishing to repent that the lightest sin that she committed was that her younger son was made from her older son by cohabiting with him*)? Rav Chisda said: Get busy in preparing her shrouds (*for her imminent death*), and she died. [*Evidently, she died while repenting from the sin of immorality!*?]

The *Gemora* answers: Since she refers to her act of incest as the lightest sin, it may be assumed that she also had heresy in her (*and that is why she died*).

The *Gemora* asks: And does not one die on repenting from sins of immorality? Surely it has been taught in a *braisa*: It was said about Rabbi Elozar ben Dordia that he did not leave out any harlot in the world without cohabiting with her. Once, on hearing that there was a certain harlot in one of the towns

overseas who accepted a purse of *dinarim* for her fee, he took a purse of *dinarim* and crossed seven rivers for her sake. As he was about to cohabit with her, she blew with her mouth and said: As this blown breath will not return to its place, so they will never accept the repentance of Elozar ben Dordia. He went and sat between two mountains and hills and exclaimed: Mountains and hills, plead for mercy for me! They said to him: Before we pray for you, we will pray for ourselves. So he said: Heaven and earth, plead for mercy for me! They, too, replied: Before we pray for you, we will pray for ourselves. He then said: Sun and moon, plead for mercy for me! But they also said to him: Before we pray for you, we will pray for ourselves. He then said: Stars and constellations, plead for mercy for me! They replied: Before we pray for you, we will pray for ourselves. He exclaimed: The matter then depends only upon me! He placed his head between his knees, and cried aloud until his soul departed. Then a Heavenly Voice was heard proclaiming: Rabbi Elozar ben Dordia is destined for the life of the World to Come! Now, here was a case of a sin of immorality, and yet he did die immediately after repenting!?

The *Gemora* answers: There too, since he was addicted to immorality, it is as if he had been guilty of heresy as well.

When Rebbe heard this story, he wept and said: One may acquire his portion in the World to Come through many years, and another may acquire it in one moment!

Rebbe also said: Penitents are not only accepted, but they are even called "Rabbi"!

Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Yonasan were walking on the road and came to a fork in the road, one of which led by the door of a place of idol-worship and the other led by the door of a brothel. One said to the other: Let us go through the road leading by the place of idolatry, for the inclination for idolatry has been abolished (*by the Men of the Great Assembly*). The other however said: Let us go through the road leading by the door of a brothel, and this way, we can suppress our inclination and receive our reward. As they approached the brothel they saw the harlots withdraw (*into the brothel*) at their presence.



One said to the other: How did you know this (*that you could control your evil inclination*)? The other replied: It is written: *She shall watch over you from lewdness; understanding shall guard you.* The *Gemora* explains the verse: From matters of lewdness, the Torah shall watch over you. (16b – 17b)

***Rabbi Elozar ben Perata and
Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon***

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: When Rabbi Elozar ben Perata and Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon were arrested by the Romans, Rabbi Elozar ben Perata said to Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon: Fortunate are you that you have been arrested on one charge; woe is to me, for I have been arrested on five charges. Rabbi Chanina replied: Fortunate are you, who have been arrested on five charges, but will be saved; woe is to me, who, though I have been arrested on one charge, I will not be saved; for you have occupied yourself with the study of Torah as well as with acts of kindness, whereas I occupied myself with Torah alone.

This is in accordance with Rav Huna, who says that one who occupies himself only with the study of Torah is regarded as one who has no God.

The *Gemora* asks: Did Rabbi Chanina not engage in acts of kindness as well? But it was taught in a *braisa*: Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov says: A person should not give money to a charity fund unless there is someone appointed to oversee it like Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon.

The *Gemora* answers: The *braisa* meant someone as honest as Rabbi Chanina, although he himself did not perform acts of kindness.

The *Gemora* asks from another *braisa*: Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon said to Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma: I once mistook Purim money for ordinary charity money, so I distributed the Purim money to the poor! [Afterwards, he distributed his own money as Purim funds.]

The *Gemora* answers: He did indeed perform acts of charity, but not as much as he should have done.

When they brought up Rabbi Elozar ben Perata for his trial, they asked him: Why have you been studying the Torah, and why have you been stealing? He answered: If one is busy with a sword he cannot be busy with a book, and if one is busy with a book he cannot be busy with a sword, and as this charge is false so is the other.

They asked him: Why are you titled Master (*which means that you have illegally received Rabbinic ordination*)? He replied: I am a Master of weavers. They brought him two reels of thread and asked him: Which is for the warp and which is for the woof? A miracle occurred and a female bee came and sat on the warp and a male bee came and sat on the woof. He said to them: This is of the warp and that is of the woof.

They then asked him: Why did you not go to the House of Avidan (*where all the heretics go*)? He replied: I am old and feared that I would be trampled under your feet. They asked him: And how many old people have been trampled until now? A miracle happened; for on that very day, an old man had been trampled.

They asked him: And why did you free your slave (*in the Biblical manner; which was against the law*)? He replied: No such thing ever happened. A Roman began to rise to give evidence against him, when Eliyahu came disguised as one of the officials of Rome and said to that man: As miracles occurred for him in all the other matters, a miracle will also happen in this one, and you will only be shown up as being wicked. He, however, disregarded him and stood up to address the judges, when a written communication from important officials of the government had to be sent to the Emperor in Rome, and it was dispatched by that man. While he was on the road, Eliyahu came and hurled him a distance of four hundred *parsaos*, so that he went and did not return to testify. (17b)



INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

“And you will repent...with all your soul”

Many years ago one of the *talmidei chachamim* of Yerushalayim, HaGaon Rav Chayim Shraga Feivel Frank zt”l, miraculously recovered from a fatal illness. In the beginning of his *Toledos Zeev* (on Shabos, III), he details the miracle of his recovery and remarks that an infirm person’s dear ones should inform him of his serious condition so that he should have a chance to repent (see *Shulchan Aruch*, Y.D. 339). In his opinion, this should be done even if the effect of such a notification is liable to worsen his condition, as we rely on *Nefesh HaChayim*, as follows.

Self-sacrifice for repentance: We know that there are three sins for which a person must sacrifice himself to avoid committing: idolatry, murder and immorality (Sanhedrin 74a). But there is another commandment for which one must sacrifice oneself: repentance! This amazing revelation is included in the interpretation of HaGaon Rav Chayim of Volozhin zt”l (at the end of *Nefesh HaChayim*) of the verse “And you will **repent** to Hashem...with all your heart and with all your **soul**” (Devarim 30:2). In other words, one should sacrifice oneself to repent. Rav Chayim asserts that he does not derive this from the verse but from an explicit *Gemora*. Our *sugya* says that anyone who forsakes heresy (*minus*) dies, even if he repents, as we are told: “All those who adhere to it will not return” (Mishlei 2:19). Also those who repent for other sins to which they had been very strongly attached die “out of distress while defeating their inclination and this is the King’s decree that they should die” writes Rashi (s.v. *Lo yeshuvun*). Apropos, the *Gemora* tells us about Rabbi Elozar ben Durdiya, who repented and died. We thus learn that repentance must not be avoided, even if it might threaten one’s life.

However, our *sugya* concerns repentance in order to prevent the repetition of a sin. It could be, though, that we cannot learn from there that someone wanting to repent for a past sin may endanger himself. In addition, our *sugya* relates to the three sins for which one must sacrifice oneself to avoid committing and we cannot learn from there as for other transgressions.

Moreover, even if there is an obligation to sacrifice oneself to repent, one shouldn’t inform an ill person about his dire condition as he might die of fear and not because of repentance! Still, we should mention that the *Sidur Beis Ya’akov* by Rabbi Yaakov Emdin zt”l (*Dinei Hanhagas HaBoker, Seder Ba’al Keri*, 18) says that if a person deliberately brought himself to a state where he can’t evade a sin unless he endangers himself, “he must endanger himself”.

The founder of Christianity and „Aleinu leshabeiach

Amud alef of *daf* 17 is one of the pages of the Talmud that suffered badly from the European censors to the point where a learner almost cannot distinguish the end of one statement from the beginning of another. Thus, for example, we have the sentence “...and I found someone called Yaakov Ish Kefar Sachniya...He told me “Thus he taught me.” The *Gemora* indicates that Yaakov Ish Kefar Sachniya was a Christian but doesn’t mention it. The words “Thus he taught me” are also not clear enough and the original text, appearing in *Chesronos HaShas* and the Wagshal edition, reads “...and I found a disciple of **Yeishu HaNotzri** called Yaakov Ish Kefar Sachniya. He told me, “thus was I taught by **Yeishu HaNotzri**.”

The source of the name Yeishu HaNotzri: The censors did not eliminate the name of Yeishu HaNotzri for nothing. The Maharil (*Minhagim*, p. 637) explains that the name indicates that he was not divine, but a person from a town called Notzer.

“The Hanged”: For many generations Jews called him by a derogatory name – “the Hanged” – since, as we shall learn (*Avodah Zarah* 45b and *Temurah* 28b), idols should be called by derisive names. Some write *Yeishu* with an apostrophe to indicate the initials of *yimach shemo vezichro* (“may his name and memory be erased”) (see Rav Chayim Paltiel’s commentary on the Torah). In his commentary on Koheles, the *Rokeiach* writes that the verse “For the living know (*yod'im*) that they will die (*sheyamusu*) and the dead (*vehameisim*) know nothing” (9:5) hints his death and helplessness. The words in the verse “...and there is (*veyesh*) an evildoer who prolongs his evil” (*ibid* 7:15) also hint at *Yeishu*, who prolonged his lies.

There was not only one Yeishu: The beginnings of Christianity are full of fiction and the Christians themselves have no sources from that era, to the point where some doubt if Yeishu actually existed (*Meshichei HaSheker Umisnagedeihem* by Rav B.S. Hamburger, Ch. 1). At any rate, a deep examination of the portions of the Talmud concerning him (see the full text of Shabos 104b; Sotah 47a; Gitin 57a; Sanhedrin 43b, 67a, 107b) teaches us that apparently two people were thus named. The first was a student of Yehoshua ben Perachyah and lived in the middle of the Second Temple era and the second lived close to the destruction of the Temple. Rabbi Yechiel of Paris, one of the authors of Tosfos, argued sharply with Christian scholars in the presence of Louis IX and used this contention to contradict many of their claims. He emphasized that many people are called Louis and not all of them are the king of France... (*Yalkut Vikuchim Umekoros Vetziyunim* in Rambam, Frenkel edition, *Hilchos Melachim*, 11:2, p. 71).

A grave without a corpse: The lies that swathed the “birth” of Christianity did not leave it with Yeishu’s death. Apparently, his grave was supposed to be in a certain church in Yerushalayim but it was proven beyond all doubt that that grave never existed but was invented about 300 years after his death (*Meshichei HaSheker Umisnagedeihem*, p. 12).

The reason for saying ‘Aleinu leshabeiach: ‘Aleinu leshabeiach is one of the earliest prayers, instituted by Yehoshua (*Kolbo*, 16) and in light of its importance it is said standing (*ibid* and #11). According to the *Bach* (132), its pronouncement at the end of prayer was meant to strengthen a person’s faith before he goes to market to deal with gentiles so that if he sees them succeeding, he shouldn’t have any thought of transgression.

Why the censor eliminated varik: Many *sidurim*, especially those printed by photoengraving, lack the following passage mentioned by the *Remo* (*Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 132:2): “...for they bow to vanity and emptiness and pray to a god who does not save.” According to Rabeinu Shlomo of Germaiza (*Sidur*, pp. 122 and 124), this passage was eliminated as the numerical value of the word *varik* (“and emptiness”) equals that of Yeishu and the Christians thought that the Jews meant to disdain him,

to the point that in certain places they forced them to say ‘Aleinu leshabeiach aloud to assure that they were obeying the censor (*Minhagim Dikehilas Kodesh Vormaiza*, 12, remark 22). Apropos, it is interesting to note that in the *Machazor* of Rav Simchah of Vitry, Rashi’s pupil, there is a remark to say ‘Aleinu leshabeiach softly. Was the direction meant to fill a void?

The *Sidur HaGera* (*Ishei Yisrael*, Ch. 45:71, S.K. 196) mentions in the name of Maharil Diskin zt”l that anyone who eliminates the above passage changes the integral text instituted by *Chazal*. The statement “...and the seat of His honor (*yekaro*) is in the heavens above” also has a variant text – “...and the throne of His honor (*kevodo*) is in the heavens above” and that is the Vilna Gaon’s text (*Ma’aseh Rav, Hilchos Tefilah*, 53) as the numerical value of *yekaro* equals that of Yeishu (*Leket Yosher*, p. 29) but some paid no attention to that (see *Minhagim Tirna*, p. 13; *Mekor Chayim on Chavos Yair*, 132:2; *Meshichei HaSheker Umisnagedeihem*, p. 11).

DAILY MASHAL

Go Eat Your Bread in Joy

Our *Gemora* tells us about Rabbi Elozar ben Durdiya who sinned and then regretted his deeds so much that he died of sorrow. HaGaon Rav Yitzchak Ze’ev of Brisk said that we can learn from there that every sin troubles a person, even if not to the point of death. For that reason a Heavenly voice (*bas kol*) announces at the end of Yom Kippur, after the confessions and repentance, “Go, eat your bread in joy.”

There Is No One Without a Moment

Rebbe wept and said, “...some acquire their World in one hour.” Why did Rebbe weep? Rabbi Meir Shapira zt”l used to say that sometimes a person has a special time in which he can acquire his portion in the World to Come and that opportunity will never return; therefore Rebbe cried (*Sefer HaYovel LeMaharam Shapira*).