



Volume 10. Issue 40

## The Nature of Avodah Zara

The *Mishnah* in *Avodah Zara* (4:7) brings a dialogue that the Romans had with the Sages in which the Romans asked why *Hashem* does not simply destroy all idols if he despises them so much. The Sages replied that the idols that are being worshipped consist of things that the world depends upon, such as the sun, moon, stars and star signs and that *Hashem* will not simply destroy the world just to negate the opinions of fools who worship them. The Romans then asked why *Hashem* does not destroy the idols that the world has no need for. To this they replied that if *Hashem* did so, it would lead people to believe that the remaining idols were gods, since they were not destroyed.

The *Rambam* in his commentary to this *Mishnah* writes a lengthy paragraph, where he discusses that many Jewish Sages in his time believed that the idols and star signs that idolaters worshipped actually exist and that worshipping them and praying to them had an effect; only that *Torah* forbade us to do so. The *Rambam* insists that this view is incorrect and that the idols and star signs are not real and have no power whatsoever. He also says the same thing regarding *Sheidim* and black magic. The *Rambam* also writes something very similar in the *Mishneh Torah* (*Hilchot Avodah Zara* 11:16), where he insists that star signs and black magic have no power and effect, and that it is not fitting for *Bnei Yisrael* (who are considered a wise nation) to believe that they exist.

The *Rambam* seems to follow the approach of *Rashi* on Chumash. When the *Torah* says “You shall not have any other gods before you” (*Shemot* 20:2), *Rashi* interprets “other gods” to mean that they are ‘others’ even with respect to the people that worship them, since they have no effect when they are worshipped.

On the other hand, the *Ramban* (*Bereshit* 1:18) says that *Hashem* created star signs that control what occurs in the lower worlds and that they do exist. The verse in *Parshat Va’etchanan*, warning *Bnei Yisrael* against idol worship, says: “And lest you will raise your eyes to the heavens and see the sun and the moon and the stars, and you will go astray and bow to them and worship them; that which Hashem, your G-d has apportioned to all the nations under the heavens” (*Devarim* 4:19). The *Ramban* interprets these last words to mean that *Hashem* appointed different star signs as ministers over each of the nations (with the exception of *Bnei Yisrael*), and that the nations turned them into gods and worshipped them. According to the *Ramban*, it would seem that star signs actually have power and that if the nations prayed to their particular star sign, it would have an effect. Nevertheless, *Hashem* forbade the nations to worship them, since their power comes from *Hashem* and that it is fitting to worship Him alone (see *Emet Le’Yaakov Devarim* 4:19, who interprets the *Ramban* this way).

Perhaps a middle approach can be found in the *Ibn Ezra*. The *Ibn Ezra* writes in a few places (*Shemot* 20:2; 23:25; 33:21) that although star signs exist, praying to them has no effect, since they are programmed to perform exactly the way that *Hashem* decreed and they have no ability to change their own nature. Only praying to *Hashem* will have an effect, since He has the ability to change their nature or to save us from them. According to the *Ibn Ezra*, this is what the *Gemara* means when it says “*Ein Mazal L’Yisrael*” (*Shabbat* 156a). Although the occurrences of the world are controlled by star signs, when we worship *Hashem*, He will enable us to overcome their influences and be above nature.

Aron Rubin

### Revision Questions

עבודה זרה די' די' ה' ה'

- What is the difference between a Jew and non-Jew with regards to nullifying an *avodah zara*? (די' די')
- Explain the *machloket* between *Rebbi* and *Chachamim* regarding selling or pledging an idol. (די' ה')
- Is an *avodah zara* left in a time of war *mutar* or *assur*? (די' ו')
- From when does wine become *yayin nesech*? (די' ח')
- What activities may one do with a *nochri* in a winepress? (די' ט')
- What activities may one do with a baker who is in a state of *tum'ah*? (די' ט')
- If a *nochri* is standing beside a *bor*, in what situation would the wine contained there be *assur*? (די' י')
- What are the four occurrences that occurred to wine in a *bor* which *R' Shimon* permitted? (די' י')
- If one makes *tahor* wine and leaves it in the *nochri's* possession what are the attributes of the house and city in which this wine is placed, to ensure it is permitted? (די' י"א)
- What was the *ma'aseh* that occurred in *Beit She'an* with someone who was *metaher* the wine of a *nochri*? (די' י"ב)
- If one was hired to produce *yayin nesech* what is the status of his salary? (ה' י"א)
- In what situation would the income received from hiring out a donkey be forbidden? (ה' י"א)
- How much *yayin nesech* must fall on dates and figs to make them *assur*? (ה' י"ב)
- Explain the *machloket* between *Tana Kama* and *R' Shimon ben Gamliel* regarding a *nochri* who is transporting jars of wine without a Jew being present. (ה' י"ג)
- If one leaves his jug of wine with a *nochri* in his store and is not present at all times is that wine *mutar*? (ה' די')
- If one was eating with a *nochri* at a table, in what instance would the wine that is placed on the *dulbaki* (side table): (ה' ה')
  - *Assur*?
  - *Mutar*?

### Local Shiurim

#### Melbourne, Australia

**Sunday -Thursday**  
10 minutes before *Mincha*  
Mizrachi Shul  
Melbourne, Australia

**Friday & Shabbat**  
10 minutes before *Mincha*  
Beit Ha'Roeh  
Melbourne, Australia

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#### Efrat, Israel

*Shiur in English*

**Sunday -Thursday**  
Rabbi Mordechai Scharf  
9:00am  
Kollel Magen Avraham  
Reemon Neighbourhood

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#### ONLINE SHIURIM

*Rabbi Chaim Brown*  
[www.shemayisrael.com/mishna/](http://www.shemayisrael.com/mishna/)

*Rav Meir Pogrow*  
[613.org/mishnah.html](http://613.org/mishnah.html)

*Rabbi E. Kornfeld*  
*Rabbi C. Brown*  
<http://www.dafyomi.co.il/calendars/myomi/myomi-thisweek.htm>

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#### SHIUR ON KOL HALOSHON

*Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss*  
In US dial: 718 906 6400  
Then select: 1 – 2 – 4

### Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
17 <sup>th</sup> November י"ז כסלו	18 <sup>th</sup> November ט"ח כסלו	19 <sup>th</sup> November ט"ט כסלו	20 <sup>th</sup> November י"א כסלו	21 <sup>st</sup> November י"ב כסלו	22 <sup>nd</sup> November י"ג כסלו	23 <sup>rd</sup> November כ' כסלו
Avodah Zara 5:6-7	Avodah Zara 5:8-9	Avodah Zara 5:10:11	Avodah Zara 5:12 – Avot 1:1	Avot 1:2-3	Avot 1:4-5	Avot 1:6-7

