



Volume 4. Issue 38

## Modern Day Avodah Zara

We recently commenced learning the *Mishnayot* of *Masechet Avodah Zara*, which, as the name of the Masechet indicates, deals with a myriad of laws pertaining to non- Jews, idol worship and idol worshippers. *Masechet Avodah Zara* continues teaching us the laws relating to *Avodah Zara* which we began learning in *Masechet Sanhedrin*, and is thus included in *Seder Nezikin*.

The *Rambam*, *Ramban* and various other philosophers and Jewish thinkers identify the source of *Avodah Zara* originating from a corruption of Divine service. They explain that in early history it was clear to all that *Hashem* was the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. In attempts to pay homage and respect to *Hashem*, people began to display reverence towards His intermediaries, namely the sun, moon and stars, as well as the forces and creations of nature. People then began to believe that these entities possessed powers of their own, and were thus worthy of worship and homage. The end result of the proliferation of this behaviour and fundamentally flawed outlook was the widespread forgetting of *Hashem*, and the evolution of the service of these various entities into *Avodah Zara*.

The most famous of the various enjoinders in the *Torah* forbidding us to engage in *Avoda Zara* appears in the *Aseret HaDibrot*, the Ten Commandments, in *Parshat Yitro*: “You shall not recognise the gods of other in My presence. You shall not make yourself a carved image nor any likeness of that which is in the heavens above or on the earth below...you shall not prostrate yourself to them nor worship them, for I am Hashem your G-d” (*Shmot* 20:3-5). This prohibition thus consists of three elements:

a) it is forbidden to believe in idols; b) we are not allowed to make or own them; and c) it is forbidden to worship them.

*Masechet Avodah Zara* primarily discusses the laws that govern the interaction between the Jewish people

and *goyim*, with the main theme being that we must distance ourselves from non- Jews in certain personal, social, religious and economic contexts and circumstances. *Kehati* identifies the source of these laws in *Shmot* 34: 12-17: “Be vigilant lest you seal a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you come...and stray after their gods, worship and slaughter to their gods, and he invite you and you eat from the from his slaughter. And you take from their daughters for your sons...”. *Kehati* explains that we are limited in various interactions with *goyim* lest we mingle with them and *chas veshalom* be influenced to follow in their ways which may involve *Avodah Zara*. We are also required to remove ourselves so as to prevent us from causing a non- Jew to participate in *Avodah Zara*.

Nowadays, when it is rare in our everyday lives to encounter people bowing down to the sun and various trees in worship and supplication, what practical effect do these laws pertaining to *Avodah Zara* have on us? *Rav Yitzchak Hutner* in his *sefer - Pachad Yitzchak* explains that after the *yetzer hara* for *Avodah Zara* was “slaughtered” by the *tfillot* of the *Anshei Knesset HaGedola*, the Men of the Great Assembly (*Sanhedrin* 102b), “Idolatry now took a new form that represented the willing overthrowing of the Yoke of Heaven”. Modern day idolatry thus consists of actions or thoughts whereby we remove our awareness of *Hashem's* commandments and constant presence in our lives, and instead choose paths of unrestrained urges, lust and greed. An example of this is that *Chazal* teach us that “anyone who becomes angry is like one who practices idolatry”, and this holds true when we submit to any of our primal urges in defiance of the restraint and boundaries required of us by Jewish law. Thus, the message of distancing ourselves from *Avodah Zara* and negative influences, and instead immersing ourselves in the wisdom and love of the *Torah* and *Mitzvot*, is still a very relevant one for us today.

*Matti Borowski*

**Revision Questions**

*Avodah Zara (1:8 – 3:5)*

- What specific types of jewellery are mentioned by the *Mishna* as those forbidden to make for *Avodah Zara*? (1:8)
- Explain the debate regarding renting and selling fields and houses to *goyim* in-
  - *Chutz La'aretz*
  - *Eretz Yisrael*? (1:8)
- Why is one unable to rent out a *Merchatz* to a *goy*? (1:9)
- What two things may one not do for a *nochri* baby? (2:1)
- What type of *refuah* may one receive from a *goy*? (2:2)
- List 4 items belonging to *goyim* that are *Issurei Hana'ah*? (2:3)
- Explain the opinion of *R' Akiva* regarding meat used for *Avodah Zarah*? (2:3)
- List three differences between *R' Meir* and the *Chachamim* regarding items that belonging to *goyim* that are *issurei hana'ah*? (2:4)
- According to *R' Yehoshua* what is the reason that cheese belonging to *goyim* is not permitted? (2:5)
- List 4 items belonging to *goyim* that are *assur* but they are not *issurei hana'ah*? (2:6)
- List 5 items belonging to *goyim* that are permissible to eat? (2:7)
- From which type of *chagavim* must one take *Terumah*? (2:7)
- Explain the opinions of *R' Meir*, *Chachamim* and *R' Shimon Ben Gamliel* regarding *Tselamim*? (3:1)
- What individual pieces of a *Tselem* are *Mutar* and which are *Assur*? (3:2)
- What *keilim* must be destroyed according to –
  - *Tanna Kamma*
  - *R' Shimon Ben Gamliel*
  - *R' Yose*
- What question was posed to *R' Gamliel* by *Proklos Ben Plosphos*? (3:4)
- What was *R' Gamliel's* first answer to this question? (3:4)
- What was *R' Gamliel's* second response? (3:4)
- Explain the debate regarding if mountains and valleys used for *Avodah Zara* are *mutar*? (3:5)
- According to *R' Yose* why is an *Asheira* tree *passul*? (3:5)

**Local Shiurim**

**Sunday -Thursday**  
Between mincha & ma'ariv  
Mizrachi Shul

**Friday & Shabbat**  
10 minutes before mincha  
Mizrachi Shul

**Audio Shiurim on-line!**

- [613.org/mishnah.html](http://613.org/mishnah.html)
- [www.shemayisrael.com/mishna/](http://www.shemayisrael.com/mishna/)

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– *Yisrael*  
*Yitzchak ben*  
*Malka*

**Next Week's Mishnayot...**

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
10 February	11 February	12 February	13 February	14 February	15 February	16 February
Avodah Zara 3:6-7	Avodah Zara 3:8-9	Avodah Zara 3:10-4:1	Avodah Zara 4:2-3	Avodah Zara 4:4-5	Avodah Zara 4:6-7	Avodah Zara 4:8-9

