

# How to Avoid Idling with Idols

## Parashat Re'eh 5785

### Congregation Shearith Israel Torah Study 8/23/25

Source Sheet by Rabbi Ari Sunshine

#### Deuteronomy 12:1-3

(1) These are the laws and rules that you must carefully observe in the land that יהוה, God of your ancestors, is giving you to possess, as long as you live on earth. (2) You must destroy all the sites at which the nations you are to dispossess worshiped their gods, whether on lofty mountains and on hills or under any luxuriant tree. (3) Tear down their altars, smash their pillars, put their sacred posts to the fire, and cut down the images of their gods, obliterating their name from that site.

#### דברים י"ב:א'-ג'

(א) אֱלֹהֵי הַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר  
תִּשְׁמְרוּן לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיךָ לָךְ לְרִשְׁתָּהּ כָּל-הַיָּמִים  
אֲשֶׁר-אַתֶּם חַיִּים עַל-הָאָדָמָה: (ב) אֲבִד  
וְתִאבְדּוּן אֶת-כָּל-הַמִּקְדָּשִׁים אֲשֶׁר  
עָבְדוּ-שָׁם הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם יֹרְשִׁים אֹתָם  
אֶת-אֱלֹהֵיהֶם עַל-הַהָרִים הַרְמִים  
וְעַל-הַגְּבֻעוֹת וְתַחַת כָּל-עֵץ רַעֲנָן: (ג)  
וְנִתְּצוּם אֶת-מִזְבְּחֹתָם וְשִׁבְרֹתָם  
אֶת-מִצְבְּוֹתָם וְאֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם תִּשְׂרֹפוּן בְּאֵשׁ  
וּפְסִילֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶם תִּגְדַּעוּן וְאֲבַדְתֶּם  
אֶת-שְׁמֵם מִן-הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא:

#### Avodah Zarah 54b:14-16

**GEMARA:** The Sages taught: Certain philosophers [*filosofin*] asked the Jewish Sages who were in Rome: If it is not your God's will that people should engage in idol worship, for what reason does He not eliminate it? The Sages said to them: Were people worshipping only objects for which the world has no need, He would eliminate it. But they worship the sun and the moon and the stars and the constellations. Should He destroy the world because of the fools? Rather, the world follows its course, and the fools who sinned will be held to judgment in the future for their transgressions. The *baraita* presents another matter that illustrates the same concept: Consider the case of one who stole a *se'a* of wheat and went and planted it in the ground. By right it should not grow.

#### עבודה זרה נ"ד בי"ד-ט"ז

גמ' תנו רבנן: שאלו פלוסופין את  
הזקנים ברומי: אם אלהיכם אין רצונו  
בעבודה זרה, מפני מה אינו מבטלה?  
אמרו להם: אילו לדבר שאין העולם צורך  
לו היו עובדין, הרי הוא מבטלה. הרי הן  
עובדין לחמה וללבנה ולכוכבים ולמזלות,  
יאבד עולם מפני השוטים? אלא עולם  
כמנהגו נוהג, ושוטים שקלקלו עתידין  
ליתן את הדין. דבר אחר: הרי שגזל סאה  
של חטים [והלה] וזרעה בקרקע – דין  
הוא שלא תצמח, אלא עולם כמנהגו נוהג  
והולה, ושוטים שקלקלו עתידין ליתן את  
הדין. דבר אחר: הרי שבא על אשת  
חבירו – דין הוא שלא תתעבר, אלא  
עולם כמנהגו נוהג והולה, ושוטים  
שקלקלו עתידין ליתן את הדין.



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But the world goes along and follows its course and the fools who sinned will be held to judgment in the future for their transgressions. The *baraita* presents another matter that illustrates the same concept: Consider the case of one who engaged in intercourse with the wife of another. By right she should not become pregnant. But the world goes along and follows its course and the fools who sinned will be held to judgment in the future for their transgressions.

#### Sanhedrin 102b:2-4

One day Rav Ashi ended his lecture just before reaching the matter of the three kings. He said to his students: Tomorrow we will begin the lecture with our colleagues the three kings, who, although they were sinners, were Torah scholars like us. Manasseh, king of Judea, came and appeared to him in his dream. Manasseh said to him angrily: You called us your colleague and the colleagues of your father? How dare you characterize yourself as our equal? Manasseh said to him: I will ask you, from where are you required to begin cutting a loaf of bread when reciting the blessing: Who brings forth bread from the earth? Rav Ashi said to him: I do not know. Manasseh said to him: Even this, from where you are required to begin cutting a loaf of bread when reciting the blessing: Who brings forth bread from the earth, you did not learn, and yet you call us your colleague? Rav Ashi said to Manasseh: Teach me this *halakha* and tomorrow I will lecture and cite it in your name during my public lecture delivered on the Festival. Manasseh said to him: One cuts the loaf from where it crusts as a result of baking.

#### סנהדרין ק"ב ב:ב' ד'

רב אשי אוקי אשלשה מלכים אמר למחר נפתח בחברין אתא מנשה איתחזי ליה בחלמיה אמר חברך וחבירי דאבוך קרית לן מהיכא בעית למישרא המוציא אמר ליה לא ידענא א"ל מהיכא דבעית למישרא המוציא לא גמירת וחברך קרית לן א"ל אגמריה לי ולמחר דרישנא ליה משמך בפירקא א"ל מהיכא דקרים בישולא א"ל מאחר דחכימתו כולי האי מאי טעמא קא פלחיתו לעבודת כוכבים א"ל אי הות התם הות נקיטנא בשיפולי גלימא ורהטת אבתראי למחר אמר להו לרבנן נפתח ברבוותא



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Rav Ashi said to him: Since you were so wise, what is the reason you engaged in idol worship? Manasseh said to him: Had you been there at that time, you would have taken and lifted the hem of your cloak and run after me due to the fierce desire to engage in idol worship and due to the fact that it was a common faith. The next day Rav Ashi said to the Sages as a prelude to his lecture: We will begin with the treatment of our teachers, those kings who were greater than us in Torah knowledge but whose sins caused them to lose their share in the World-to-Come.

#### Avodah Zarah 44b

**MISHNA:** A wise gentile, Proclus ben Plosphus, once asked a question of Rabban Gamliel in the city of Akko when he was bathing in the bathhouse of the Greek god Aphrodite. Proclus said to him: It is written in your Torah: "And nothing of the proscribed items shall cleave to your hand" (Deuteronomy 13:18). For what reason do you bathe before an idol in the bathhouse of Aphrodite? Rabban Gamliel said to him: One may not answer questions related to Torah in the bathhouse. And when he left the bathhouse, Rabban Gamliel gave him several answers. He said to him: I did not come into its domain; it came into my domain. The bathhouse existed before the statue dedicated to Aphrodite was erected. Furthermore, people do not say: Let us make a bathhouse as an adornment for Aphrodite; rather, they say: Let us make a statue of Aphrodite as an adornment for the bathhouse.

#### עבודה זרה מ"ד ב

מתני' שאל פרוקלוס בן פלוספוס את רבן גמליאל בעכו, שהיה רוחץ במרחץ של אפרודיטי. אמר ליה: כתוב בתורתכם "לא ידבק בידך מאומה מן החרם", מפני מה אתה רוחץ במרחץ של אפרודיטי? אמר לו: אין משיבין במרחץ. וכשיצא אמר לו: אני לא באתי בגבולה, היא באה בגבולי. אין אומרים: נעשה מרחץ נוי לאפרודיטי, אלא אומר: נעשה אפרודיטי נוי למרחץ. דבר אחר: אם נותנים לה ממון הרבה, אי אתה נכנס לעבודה זרה שלך ערום ובעל קרי ומשתין בפניה, זו עומדת על פי הביב וכל העם משתינין לפניה, לא נאמר אלא "אלהיהם" — את שנוהג בו משום אלוה — אסור, את שאינו נוהג בו משום אלוה — מותר.



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Therefore, the main structure is not the Aphrodite statue, but the bathhouse. Rabban Gamliel continued: **Alternatively**, there is another answer: Even if people would **give you a lot of money, you would not enter** before your object of idol worship naked, or as one who experienced a seminal emission who comes to the bathhouse to purify himself, nor would you urinate before it. This statue stands upon the sewage pipe and all the people urinate before it. There is no prohibition in this case, as it is stated in the verse only: **“Their gods”** (see Deuteronomy 12:2), which indicates that a statue that people treat as a deity is forbidden, but one that people do not treat with the respect that is due to a deity is permitted.