

The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Avodah Zarah 51-57

Week of 6-12 Kislev 5756 / 29 November-5 December
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

The Abandoned Tower

The Rule:	It is forbidden to derive any benefit whatsoever from a statue worshipped as an idol until some idol worshipper tangibly demonstrates a rejection of that idol as an object of worship. One form of rejection is leaving behind the idol when traveling to another locale.
The Exception:	There is a qualification, however, in regard to the motive for the idol owner's relocation. If he abandoned his idol under the forced circumstances of war this abandonment is not considered a rejection.
The Problem:	The House of Nimrod (the Tower of Babel constructed under the rule of Nimrod and worshipped as an idol — Rashi) is considered as having been rejected by its worshippers who left it behind when they were dispersed by Heaven. If forced abandonment is not considered as rejection why is the abandonment of this tower so considered despite the fact that its worshippers were dispersed against their will?
The Resolution:	The dispersed worshippers of the idolatrous tower, unlike refugees of war, had the opportunity of returning and relocating it to their new homes. Their failure to do so is therefore interpreted as rejection.
The Footnote:	Rashi's interpretation of the Tower of Babel as a pagan idol is consistent with the commentaries of Ramban and Sforno (Bereishis 11:4) but is hardly evident in his own commentary on Chumash. It may be suggested that what he intended to convey in his second explanation of the phrase, "singular matters" as a plot against "the Single One of the Universe" (Bereishis 11:1) is that Nimrod and his followers attempted to challenge the monotheistic concept of a single deity by creating a tower which would be worshipped alongside the Creator.

Avodah Zarah 53b

A Time to Come, A Time to Go

"Both of us know that idols have no power," said Zonin to Rabbi Akiva, "so how do we explain the fact that sometimes their worshippers come to them crippled from illness and walk away with their limbs healed?"

The Sage replied with a parable:

There was once a very honest person in a town whom people so trusted that they would leave their precious belongings in his safekeeping without even taking the precaution of doing so in front of witnesses. One man, however, refused to rely on his honesty and would insist on witnesses being on hand when he left something in his safekeeping. On one occasion he left something in his trust and forgot to have witnesses on hand. The guardian's wife, still smarting from the insult to her husband's honesty implied by the past insistence on witnesses, suggested to him that they get even with him by exploiting his oversight to deny that they ever received the item he had just left in their safekeeping.

Just because this fool acted improperly, replied the husband, must we abandon our faithfulness?

In similar fashion, concluded Rabbi Akiva, when pains are sent from Heaven to afflict a man they are sworn to a strict schedule exactly when they must come and when they must go, at precisely which hour they must depart and which healer and medicine should be the agents of the cure. When the appointed time comes for them to leave and the sufferer visits the idol's temple these pains first say "It is only right that we should not leave." But then they say "Just because this fool acted improperly must we abandon our faithfulness to which we have been sworn?"

Avodah Zarah 55a

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