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Avodah Zarah (Idolatry)

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# I. Introduction

In this [study](study.html) I would like to examine avodah zarah[[1]](#footnote-1) (idolatry).

What is avodah zarah?

The dictionary[[2]](#footnote-2) defines idolatry as the worship of a [physical](physical.html) object as a G-d. Obviously this is *not* a Torah perspective, yet it serves the vast majority of mankind as a working definition.

So, what is avodah zarah according to the Torah?

According to the Torah, idolatry can best be defined as the deification of any created thing, be it an object, concept, philosophy, or individual. The object of deification, therefore, becomes the focal point of [one](one.html)’s life. By focusing on the falsely deified thing, [one](one.html) thus loses focus of the True source of all – [HaShem](hashem.html). Never the less, avodah zarah is a very seductive passion, and [one](one.html) wonders why [HaShem](hashem.html) does not remove it.

***Avodah Zarah 4*** *The sages while in* [*Rome*](edom.html) *were asked, “If [G-d] does not want avodah zarah why does He not abolish it?” They replied, “Had they [the idol worshippers] been worshipping things the* [*world*](worlds.html) *does not need He would have done so. They, however, are worshipping the* [*sun*](hachama.html)*,* [*moon*](chodesh.html)*,* [*stars*](mazaroth.html) *and* [*signs*](signs.html) *[*[*zodiac*](mazaroth.html)*]. Should the* [*world*](worlds.html) *be destroyed because of fools?” They [the questioners] said, “Let Him destroy the [worshipped] things that are not necessary for the* [*world*](worlds.html) *leaving those that are.” They replied, “That would further strengthen their worshippers. That would further strengthen the legitimacy of the ones that were not destroyed, as G-ds.”*

An interesting aspect of avodah zarah, that is discussed in [*Masechet Sanhedrin*](orallaw.html)*,* is the fact that avodah zarah is forbidden not only to [Jews](gen-jew.html) but to all people of the [world](worlds.html), as it is [one](one.html) of the [seven](seven.html) [Noachide](noachide.html) [laws](law.html). This impacts on [Jews](gen-jew.html), as well, since they are commanded to destroy the idol worship in the [land of Israel](city.html) and, theoretically, throughout the [world](worlds.html). Even if is not within the power of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people to accomplish this, nevertheless [Jews](gen-jew.html) are not allow to support those who want to worship idols or assist them in doing so.

Similarly, participating in pagan holidays and [festivals](festivals.html) is forbidden.

But, I am getting a bit ahead of myself; however it is important that we at least have a definition at this point. Later we are going to drill down and look at this more closely.

As we all [know](daat.html), there are specific Torah prohibitions against idolatry. [One](one.html) of the most recognized passages, against idolatry, is in the giving of the Torah at [Sinai](stages.html):

***Shemot (***[***Exodus***](exodus.html)***) 20:1-6*** *And G-d spake all these words, saying, 2 I am* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *thy G-d, which have brought thee* [*out of the land of Egypt*](thebirth.html)*, out of the house of bondage. 3 Thou shalt have no other G-ds before me. 4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in* [*heaven*](heaven.html) *above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: 5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *thy G-d am a jealous G-d, visiting the iniquity of the* [*fathers*](fathers.html) *upon the children unto the* [*third*](three.html) *and* [*fourth*](four.html)[*generation*](toldot.html) *of them that hate me; 6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my* [*commandments*](cmds613.html)*.*

Kabbalisticaly, the second [commandment](cmds613.html), prohibiting idolatry, is the root of all the [negative commandments](cmds613.html); just as the [first](one.html) [commandment](cmds613.html) is the root of all of the [positive commandments](cmds613.html). This is understood from the fact that [HaShem](hashem.html) listed them [first](one.html) before any other positive or negative [commandments](cmds613.html).

The Nazarean Codicil[[3]](#footnote-3) also condemns idolatry:

***I Corinthians 10:14*** *Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.*

***II Luqas (Acts) 15:19*** *Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the* [*Gentiles*](gen-jew.html) *are turned to G-d: 20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from* [*fornication*](marriageact.html)*, and from things strangled, and from* [*blood*](body.html)*.*

Rabbi Tatz[[4]](#footnote-4) explains idolatry as follows: *“If idolatry is merely the worship of imaginary, dreamed-up ideas or human delusions then why does the Torah go to such pains to forbid it? The Torah could have simply said: “Don’t believe in falsehood” or “Don’t be a fool”. Obviously the Torah is warning us about the existence of a very real danger.*

Torah deals with idolatry as though it is real. Why does the Torah even countenance false G-ds if they do not exist?

Further, the Tanach[[5]](#footnote-5) deals with false G-ds by using the very names which we attribute to [HaShem](hashem.html)! As [HaShem](hashem.html) uses the [name](name.html) *Elohim* when He is exercising the attribute of strict justice, so also are false G-ds called “[Elohim](conundrum.html)”. In fact every other [name](name.html) that is used to refer to [HaShem](hashem.html) is also used to refer to false G-ds, *except* the [name](name.html) [*HaShem*](hashem.html). The only [name](name.html) never associated with idolatry is the yod-hay-vav-hay [name](name.html) of [HaShem](hashem.html).

On the other [hand](fourteen.html), the Tanach deals with idolatry as though it was foolishness and amounts to nothing.

***Yesahyahu (Isaiah) 44:13-19*** *The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. 14 He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the* [*rain*](rains.html) *doth nourish it. 15 Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a G-d, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. 16 He burneth part thereof in the* [*fire*](fire.html)*; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the* [*fire*](fire.html)*: 17 And the residue thereof he maketh a G-d, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and* [*prayeth*](prayer.html) *unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my G-d. 18 They have not* [*known*](daat.html) *nor understood: for he hath shut their* [*eyes*](body.html)*, that they cannot see; and their* [*hearts*](body.html)*, that they cannot understand. 19 And none considereth in his* [*heart*](body.html)*, neither is there* [*knowledge*](knowledge.html) *nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the* [*fire*](fire.html)*; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and* [*eaten*](eating.html) *it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree?*

So is idolatry real or is it not real? The answer is … both!

An idol has no independent power so in this case it is worthless. On the other [hand](fourteen.html), the idol represent a real channel of power that is manifest in the [physical](physical.html) [world](worlds.html). It is not The Source, but it is a tool or channel of The Source.

I had an [experience](experience.html) this week which illustrates this concept. I was dealing with a garage door vendor who had been sent out to repair my garage door by the folks who manage the house I live in. This vendor clearly saw the management company as his customer because they paid his bills and they were the ones who hired him. In the end, he lost the job because his work was unsatisfactory to me, the true customer – the true source of the resources.

In the end, however, he learned that the renter always pays the bills of the management company, the owner, and the venders. He is the true source because it is his money which funds the entire operation. The following table illustrates this relationships.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **RESOURCE SOURCE** | **INTERMIDIARY** | **HIRELING** |
| Renter | Property Manager | Vender |

We find a similar relationship with our government at any particular level. A vender usually views the governmental agency as his customer because they hire him and pay his fees. This belies the fact that all of the money that the governmental agency has, comes from the taxpayer. This means that the taxpayer is the true customer of every vender to the government. If the taxpayer receives the short end of the stick too often, then those who [head](body.html) the agency are replaced by newly elected leaders. Only a fool flaunts the will of the taxpayer. Revolutions, elections, and rebellions are the result of the failure to please the source of all government resources – the taxpayer. The following table illustrates this relationships.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **RESOURCE SOURCE** | **INTERMIDIARY** | **HIRELING** |
| Taxpayer | Government | Vender |

Finally, we find a similar relationship in the Kingdom of G-d. A man who worships idols is [one](one.html) who is looking to an intermediary to provide his [desires](needs.html) rather than The Source, i.e. [HaShem](hashem.html). Just because the intermediary can provide the goods does not mean that they are the ultimate Source of those goods.

An idol, a job, a family, money, or other things may seem like the source of our security, but, if we fail to acknowledge that [HaShem](hashem.html) is The [One](one.html) who provides all of our [needs](needs.html), The [One](one.html) that we truly serve, then we will always suffer the [consequences](conseq.html). The following table illustrates these relationships.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **RESOURCE SOURCE** | **INTERMIDIARY** | **HIRELING** |
| [HaShem](hashem.html) | [Sun](hachama.html), [Moon](chodesh.html), [Stars](mazaroth.html) | Man |

The moral of this story is to look beyond the intermediaries and keep our [eyes](body.html) focused on The Source. Do not be deceived by the appearance that it is the intermediary who provides for us, rather we should keep our [eyes](body.html) on The Source, [HaShem](hashem.html).

# II. What is avodah zarah (idolatry)?

The term “idolatry” in the contemporary modern mind translates to an ancient practice where statues and other artifacts were invested with divine powers. The broader term, avodah zarah ([alien](aliens.html) service), is understood traditionally to be the worship of multiple G-ds or objects representing those G-ds.

An inanimate object has no power, as any sane man knows.

It is important to differentiate between a *source of power* and a *wielder of power*. To the intelligent mind the idea of idolatry is not in terms of the source of power but more in terms of the wielder of power.

The clerk in a store can serve as a good example of the difference between the [two](two.html). The clerk is a wielder of power. However, in terms of the source of power, he is low in the hierarchy. His power is ultimately derived from the owner of the store. Although the owner is the source of power, he is not a wielder of power for the average customer who fronts the clerk during a purchase.

Idolatry generally concerns itself with the *wielder of power* rather than the *Source of power*.

It doesn’t make any difference to the customer how far removed the clerk of the store is from the source of power (the owner of the store). As long as the clerk is the [one](one.html) who decides how much to charge a customer, it is the clerk whom the customer is concerned with pleasing. The clerk then is the *wielder of power*, while the store owner is the *source of power*. Where the clerk’s power is derived from makes no difference to the customer. As far as he is concerned, he only has to deal with the clerk.

If the clerk [wants](needs.html) to charge full price, then the customer pays full price. If the customer slips the clerk a bribe, he may only get charged pennies on the dollar.

In the same way, idolatry generally concerns itself with the *wielder of power* rather than the Source of power. In the [eyes](body.html) of idolaters, the idol was seen neither as the source of their existence nor as the source of their well-being. They understood that ultimately there was a G-d who was the source of their existence, but they thought that he had delegated power in much the same way as the owner delegates power to the clerk. In this situation, man imagines a G-d delegating [authority](authority.html) so that it might be able to concentrate on, so to [speak](mashal.html), higher policies. Thus, when man creates his own image of [HaShem](hashem.html), he inevitably creates a G-d in the image of man.

The Rambam in the *Mishneh Torah Hilkhot Avodah zarah* 1:1 says:

*“At the* [*time*](time.html) *of Enosh, people made a great mistake. The mind of the wise of the* [*generation*](toldot.html) *became brutish and Enosh erred along with them. This was their error: They said, being that G-d created these* [*stars*](mazaroth.html) *and spheres to run the* [*world*](worlds.html)*, placing them on high and dignifying them as they are His servants, it is therefore appropriate to praise and embellish them and treat them with dignity. That is the will of G-d, blessed be He, [for us] to aggrandize and dignify those He aggrandized and dignified, just as the king* [*wants*](needs.html) *us to dignify his servants and entourage. Thus is the majesty of a king.”*

Herein lies the origin of avodah zarah.

# III. The end of the drive to idolatry

The Torah is replete with warnings against idolatry. This begs a question for those in this [generation](toldot.html): Why is it that we have no [desire](needs.html) for idolatry today?

Today, these Torah exhortations seem entirely superfluous. Almost no sane human being today has any interest in worshipping a graven image of any sort. In fact, it seems strange to us that anyone ever had such a passion.

Why do we see a disconnect between the drive of idolatry (the Yetzer HaRa) as we see it in the Torah, and the absence of the drive to idolatry that that we [experience](experience.html) today?

According to the [Talmud](orallaw.html), the Men of the Great Assembly, a group of 120 sages, some of the greatest Torah scholars ever convened during the era of the second [Beit HaMikdash](mikdash.html), excised this inclination from the human psyche.

We can get an idea of how strong the inclination for idolatry was before they conquered it. The [Talmud](orallaw.html) tells us that the Men of the Great Assembly[[6]](#footnote-6) were encouraged by their success in conquering [one](one.html) of the [two](two.html) major passions of mankind, so they decided to turn their sights on the other major passion: the inclination for promiscuity. When the sages succeeded in capturing the passion for promiscuity, however, they came to the realization that if they destroyed this passion people would no longer [procreate](marriageact.html), so they released it.

The juxtaposition of the inclination for avodah zarah and the inclination for [sex](marriageact.html), by the Torah and the Nazarean Codicil, shows that these were equal inclinations. Vayikra (Leviticus) chapter 20 shows this juxtaposition clearly. Consider also the following example in the Nazarean Codicil:

***II Luqas (Acts) 15:19*** *Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the* [*Gentiles*](gen-jew.html) *are turned to G-d: 20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from* [*blood*](body.html)*.*

Not only are [illicit sex](marriageact.html) and idolatry juxtaposed in the above passage, but we also note that idolatry is forbidden to [Gentiles](gen-jew.html).

Finally, it is worth noting that *adultery* is a [remez](remez.html) for *idolatry*.

The juxtaposition of the inclination for avodah zarah and the inclination for [sex](marriageact.html), by the [Talmud](orallaw.html), shows that these were equal inclinations. We are all aware of how difficult it is to control the inclination for licentiousness. Chazal [teach](teacher.html) us that people once had an equal passion to serve idols. This gives us all a clear idea about the passion for idols that plagued man throughout history until the [time](time.html) of the Men of the Great Assembly.

Why did prophecy end?

The reason prophecy ended is because the Men of the Great Assembly appealed to [HaShem](hashem.html) to remove the [desire](needs.html) for idolatry and with it went the [desire](needs.html) for [HaShem](hashem.html) (AKA the gift of prophecy).[[7]](#footnote-7)

The [Gemara](orallaw.html)[[8]](#footnote-8) informs us that in the [future](future.html), [HaShem](hashem.html) will slaughter the Yetzer HaRa[[9]](#footnote-9) in the presence of the righteous and the [wicked](wicked.html). To the [wicked](wicked.html), the Yetzer HaRawill appear as a strand of [hair](hair.html) and the [wicked](wicked.html) will [weep](mashal.html) at not having been able to overcome a force as weak as that symbolized by a mere strand of [hair](hair.html).

R’ [Yaakov](israelja.html) Emden explains the reason for the depiction of the Yetzer HaRaas a strand of [hair](hair.html) with a [Gemara](orallaw.html) in Yoma. The [Gemara](orallaw.html)[[10]](#footnote-10) relates that the Men of the Great Assembly[[11]](#footnote-11) [prayed](prayer.html) that the YetzerHaRa of avodah zarah be given over to them; [HaShem](hashem.html) answered their [prayer](prayer.html). A fiery lion emerged from the Holy of Holies and as the Men of the Great Assembly seized the lion, a single strand of [hair](hair.html) slipped from its mane; it is this remnant of the Yetzer HaRa that is shown to the [wicked](wicked.html) in the [future](future.html).

***Yoma 69b*** *He answered:* [*One*](one.html) *does not pronounce the* [*Ineffable Name*](name.html) *outside [the limits of the* [*Temple*](temple.html)*]. But may* [*one*](one.html) *not? Is it not written: And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose. [. . . and Ezra praised the great G-d]. And R. Giddal [commenting thereupon] said: He magnified Him by [pronouncing] the Ineffable* [*Name*](name.html)*?-That was a decision in an emergency. And [they] cried with a great [loud] voice unto the Lord, their G-d. What did they* [*cry*](mashal.html)*? — Woe, woe, it is he who has destroyed the* [*Sanctuary*](mikdash.html)*, burnt the* [*Temple*](temple.html)*, killed all the righteous, driven all* [*Israel*](http://www.betemunah.org/gen-jew.html) *into* [*exile*](galuyot.html)*, and is still dancing around among us! Thou hast surely given him to us so that we may receive reward through him. We want neither him, nor reward through him! Thereupon a tablet fell down from* [*heaven*](heaven.html) *for them, whereupon the word ‘truth’ was inscribed. (R. Hanina said:* [*One*](one.html) *may learn therefrom that the seal of the Holy* [*One*](one.html)*, blessed be He, is truth). They ordered a fast of* [*three*](three.html) *days and* [*three*](three.html) *nights, whereupon he was surrendered to them. He came forth from the Holy of Holies like a young fiery lion.*

Sefer Devarim is replete with warnings against idolatry, as the following example shows:

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 4:16*** *Lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image.*

Truthfully, our utter disinterest in idol worship is not a credit to our advanced, developed intelligence or our purer faith in [HaShem](hashem.html). The Men of the Great Assembly determined that the inclination to serve avodah zarah was too strong for mankind to withstand. The [Talmud](orallaw.html)[[12]](#footnote-12) relates how the Men of the Great Assembly captured the Yetzer HaRa for idolatry and destroyed it.

***Sanhedrin 64a*** *Come and hear: And they cried with a loud voice unto the Lord their G-d.[[13]](#footnote-13) Now what did they say? — Rab Judah, or as others maintain R. Jonathan said: [They cried this:] ‘Woe, woe, it is that [sc. idolatry] which destroyed the* [*Sanctuary*](mikdash.html)*, burnt the* [*Temple*](temple.html)*, slew the righteous, and* [*exiled*](galuyot.html)[*Israel*](israelja.html) *from their land; and still it sports amongst us! Hast Thou not set it before us that we might be rewarded [for withstanding its allurements]? But we* [*desire*](needs.html) *neither temptation nor reward!’[[14]](#footnote-14) — That too was after they were seduced by it. [Continuing Rab Judah’s statement:] They fasted for* [*three*](three.html) *days, entreating for mercy; thereafter their sentence fell from* [*Heaven*](heaven.html)*, the word emeth [truth] written upon it. (R. Hanina said: This proves that the seal of the Holy* [*One*](one.html)*, blessed be He, is emeth.) The shape of a fiery lion’s whelp issued from the Holy of Holies, and the Prophet said to Israel, That is the Tempter of Idolatry. Whilst they held it fast, a* [*hair*](hair.html) *[of its* [*body*](body.html)*] fell out, and his roar of pain was heard for* [*four*](four.html) *hundred parasangs. [In perplexity] they cried: ‘What shall we do? Maybe* [*Heaven*](heaven.html) *will pity him !’ The prophet answered: Cast him into a lead cauldron, and cover it with lead to absorb his voice, as it is written, And he said, This is* [*wickedness*](wicked.html)*; and he cast it into the midst of the ephah: and he cast the weight of lead upon the* [*mouth*](body.html) *thereof.[[15]](#footnote-15) Then they said, ‘Since the* [*time*](time.html) *is propitious, let us* [*pray*](prayer.html) *that the Tempter of* [*Sin*](sin.html) *[may likewise be delivered into our* [*hands*](fourteen.html)*].’ So they* [*prayed*](prayer.html) *and it was delivered into their* [*hands*](fourteen.html)*. They imprisoned it for* [*three*](three.html) *days; after that they sought a* [*new*](new.html) *laid egg for an invalid in the whole of Palestine and could not find* [*one*](one.html)*.[[16]](#footnote-16) Then they said, ‘What shall we do? Shall we* [*pray*](prayer.html) *that his power be but partially destroyed?[[17]](#footnote-17)* [*Heaven*](heaven.html) *will not grant it.’ So they blinded it with rouge. This was so far effective that* [*one*](one.html) *does not lust for his forbidden relations.*

This same incident is reiterated in Yoma 69b:

***Yoma 69b*** *And [they] cried with a great [loud] voice unto the Lord, their G-d.[[18]](#footnote-18) What did they* [*cry*](mashal.html)*? — Woe, woe, it is he[[19]](#footnote-19) who has destroyed the* [*Sanctuary*](mikdash.html)*, burnt the* [*Temple*](temple.html)*, killed all the righteous, driven all Israel into* [*exile*](galuyot.html)*, and is still dancing around among us! Thou hast surely given him to us so that we may receive reward through him.[[20]](#footnote-20) We want neither him, nor reward through him! Thereupon a tablet fell down from* [*heaven*](heaven.html) *for them, whereupon the word ‘truth’[[21]](#footnote-21) was inscribed. (R. Hanina said:* [*One*](one.html) *may learn therefrom that the seal of the Holy* [*One*](one.html)*, blessed be He, is truth). They ordered a fast of* [*three*](three.html) *days and* [*three*](three.html) *nights, whereupon he was surrendered to them. He came forth from the Holy of Holies like a young fiery lion. Thereupon the Prophet said to Israel: This is the evil* [*desire*](needs.html) *of idolatry, as it is said: And he said: This is* [*wickedness*](wicked.html)*.[[22]](#footnote-22) As they took hold of him a* [*hair*](hair.html) *of his* [*beard*](hair.html) *fell out, he raised his voice and it went [was audible]* [*four*](four.html) *hundred parasangs. Thereupon they said: How shall we act? Perhaps, G-d forbid, they might have mercy upon him from* [*heaven*](heaven.html)*! — The prophet said unto them: Cast him into a leaden pot, closing its opening with lead. Because lead absorbs the voice, as it is said: And he said: This is* [*wickedness*](wicked.html)*. And he cast her down into the midst of the measure, and he cast the weight of lead upon the* [*mouth*](body.html) *thereof.[[23]](#footnote-23) They said: Since this is a* [*time*](time.html) *of* [*Grace*](grace.html)*, let us* [*pray*](prayer.html) *for mercy for the Tempter to evil.[[24]](#footnote-24) They* [*prayed*](prayer.html) *for mercy, and he was handed over to them. He said to them: Realize that if you kill him, the* [*world*](worlds.html) *goes down. They imprisoned him for* [*three*](three.html) *days, then looked in the whole* [*land of Israel*](city.html) *for a fresh egg and could not find it.[[25]](#footnote-25) Thereupon they said: What shall we do now? Shall we kill him? The* [*world*](worlds.html) *would then go down. Shall we beg for half-mercy?[[26]](#footnote-26) They do not grant ‘halves’ in* [*heaven*](heaven.html)*.[[27]](#footnote-27) They put out his* [*eyes*](body.html) *and let him go. It helped inasmuch as he no more entices men to commit incest.[[28]](#footnote-28)*

The demise of idolatry (drive towards a false G-d) in the [world](worlds.html) correlates to the end of prophecy (the drive to [HaShem](hashem.html)). This is no coincidence. An ability to relate to [HaShem](hashem.html) on an elevated level prods man to search for closeness to [HaShem](hashem.html), but there is no guarantee that his effort will bear fruit. A slight distortion can corrupt his service, resulting in an avodah (service) that is ‘zarah’, foreign to the precise requirements of the [Beit HaMikdash](mikdash.html).

The men of the Great Assembly decided to cast out the Yetzer HaRa from all of Israel. Then they found, after a [time](time.html), that “there was not an egg to be found” in the entire land. What this means is that without the urge to selfish gratification, no reproduction occurred. Other versions, of this incident, say that no business was done, either. Life cannot go on without the Yetzer HaRa; our task is to live with it and subdue it, to act according to the dictates of the Torah even when our selfishness would have us act otherwise.

When the drive, or urge, for idolatry was removed from the [world](worlds.html), what was left in the human psyche?

Chazal [teach](teacher.html) us that what was left, when this inclination was removed, was … NOTHING! In the spot where this inclination lived, we now had an urge to do *nothing*. This has profound ramifications that affect everyone today.

Before the men of the Great Assembly excised the drive to idolatry, men valued their [time](time.html) and tried to make use of every moment. Only an animal would waste or kill [time](time.html). A human would never waste [time](time.html).

After idolatry was excised from the [world](worlds.html), men now had a very strong urge to do *nothing*. We can now find great pleasure in games that take us nowhere and accomplish nothing. We can engage in a rambling conversation on meaningless topics, for hours, and it feels *so good*. This is what we have instead of a drive to idolatry.

Lest we get too impressed with ourselves, the [Talmud](orallaw.html) reminds us that idolatry was an incredibly seductive force in the [time](time.html) of the [first](one.html) [Temple](temple.html). [One](one.html) of the most prolific idolaters was King Menashe. According to the [Talmud](orallaw.html),[[29]](#footnote-29) the sage Rav Ashi questioned Menashe: “If you are so wise, why did you worship idols?” King Menashe replied to the great Rabbi: “Had you been there you would have raised the skirt of your garment and run after me!”

***Sanhedrin 102b*** *In the college of R. Ashi the lecture [*[*one*](one.html) *day] terminated at ‘*[*Three*](three.html) *Kings.’[[30]](#footnote-30) ‘To-morrow, said he, ‘we will commence with our colleagues.’[[31]](#footnote-31) [That night] Manasseh came and appeared to him in a* [*dream*](dreams.html)*. ‘Thou hast called us thy colleagues and the colleagues of thy father; now, from what part [of the bread] is [the piece for reciting] the ha-mozi[[32]](#footnote-32) to be taken?’ ‘I do not* [*know*](daat.html)*,’ he answered. ‘Thou hast not learned this,’ he jibed, ‘yet thou callest us thy colleagues!’[[33]](#footnote-33) ‘*[*Teach*](teacher.html) *it me,’ he begged, ‘and to-morrow I will* [*teach*](teacher.html) *it in thy* [*name*](name.html) *at the session.’ He answered, ‘From the part that is baked into a crust.’[[34]](#footnote-34) He then questioned him, ‘Since thou art so wise, why didst thou worship idols?’ He replied, ‘Wert thou there, thou wouldst have caught up the skirt of thy garment and sped after me.’ The next day he observed to the students: We will commence with our* [*teachers*](teacher.html) *[so referring to the* [*Three*](three.html) *Kings]. Ahab denotes that he was an ah [a brother][[35]](#footnote-35) to* [*Heaven*](heaven.html)*, and an ab [a father] to idolatry. An ah to* [*Heaven*](heaven.html)*, as it is written, a brother [ah] is born for trouble,’[[36]](#footnote-36) and ab [father] to idolatry, as it is written, As a father loveth his children.[[37]](#footnote-37)*

Rav Ashi was among the greatest of the Amoraim![[38]](#footnote-38) How could this great amoraim go running after idolatry? What was avodah zarah, and how did such great men fall victim to it? In the days of the amoraim, people lived on different level. Their heads were more in the [heavens](heaven.html) than on the earth, clinging to [HaShem](hashem.html) and [knowing](knowledge.html) His ways and the way the [world](worlds.html) works. What they found was a system where [HaShem](hashem.html) controls the [world](worlds.html) through messengers[[39]](#footnote-39) with each [one](one.html) given a different task. Of course, [HaShem](hashem.html) controls all these messengers who are mere extensions of His will. To believe otherwise is heresy.

Our Sages tell us that avodah zarah was a method of forcing these messengers to do as we wish. This urge for idolatry was used to find the messenger in charge of [rain](rains.html) and forcing him to give rain. Now of course this could not happened against the will of [HaShem](hashem.html), but [HaShem](hashem.html) allowed it to be. Although their initial intentions were pure, once they had these “keys” in their [hands](fourteen.html) the temptation to manipulate it for good reasons became irresistable.

The temptation to worship idols is incomprehensible to those who did not live during Menashe's lifetime. It was only after the deaths of these kings that the Men of the Great Assembly [prayed](prayer.html) for this terrible Yetzer HaRa to be banished from the [world](worlds.html). [HaShem](hashem.html) accepted their [prayers](prayer.html), and the drive to worship idolatry became extinct.

Thus we see that the urge for idolatry was akin to the urge for [sex](marriageact.html). In fact, that is why the [Gemara](orallaw.html) links the drive to idolatry with the drive for [sex](marriageact.html) in Yoma 69b, as we saw earlier in this [study](study.html).That is how strong this urge was. In the same way that licentious [sex](marriageact.html) causes many to [sin](sin.html), so also did idolatry cause many to fall.

***Sanhedrin 63b*** *Rav Yehudah said in the* [*name*](name.html) *of Rav: Yisrael* [*knew*](daat.html) *that idolatry was meaningless, they only served it in order to permit themselves* [*sexual licentiousness*](marriageact.html) *in public.*

# IV. Astrology as avodah zarah

*Mazal* is badly translated as *luck*, but it is anything but luck. Mazal shares the same root as the word *Nozel* which means “flow”. [Spiritual](physical.html) energy flows from the inner [world](worlds.html) to our [world](worlds.html) through the medium of the [mazzaroth](mazaroth.html) (AKA the zodiac). There is no luck or randomness; everything is directed by [HaShem](hashem.html) Who is ‘hiding’ behind it all. (When we wish someone a mazal-tov we are definitely not telling them that their success was a fluke. Rather, we are invoking a flow of energy and blessing to them. That their success may be a source of more blessing in their lives.)

The mazzaroth elements split the [spiritual](physical.html) unified energy into various channels or pipelines that energize nature, giving the impression of separateness and division. There are always [twelve](twelve.html) channels (or [thirteen](thirteen.html) entities). That is why there are [twelve](twelve.html) [constellations](mazaroth.html) in the [mazzaroth](mazaroth.html) (or mazaloth). These [twelve](twelve.html) are mirrored in the [twelve](twelve.html) [tribes](tribes.html), the [twelve](twelve.html) sons of [Yaaqov](israelja.html) (the [thirteen](thirteen.html) entities are the [tribes](tribes.html) plus [Yaaqov](israelja.html)). It is this [connection](connection.html) that these [thirteen](thirteen.html) are what binds them into [one](one.html). As we [know](daat.html), [thirteen](thirteen.html) always means [*one*](one.html). (See the [study](study.html) titled: [thirteen](thirteen.html).)

Consider the [head](body.html). Inside we see ourselves in a singular unified way. Outside, others always perceive us in a differentiated way. The see a father, a son, a husband, a doctor, etc. This outside differentiated view is reflected in the [hair](hair.html) on the [head](body.html). The [hair](hair.html) would represent the constellations and the [head](body.html) would be the sphere that contains the mazzaroth.

Idolatry, is relating *not* to the Source of the unified energy, but to the pipelines, to the messengers in charge of the pipelines. The idol worshipper focuses on the [mazzaroth](mazaroth.html) or natural elements. His idols are tangible representations of the energies, he [prays](prayer.html) to them thinking that they have independent power, and he ignores [HaShem](hashem.html), the true Source of that energy and power.

When [one](one.html) worships The Source, he is concerned about what his obligations are. But [one](one.html) who serves the intermediaries is concerned about what they can do for him. The intermediaries represent human [needs](needs.html) and he doesn’t have to look any further. It is interesting to note that idols are often human forms since idolatry is really worship of the self, and a removal of the responsibility to serve a Higher Power. Who [needs](needs.html) the owner when he can bribe the clerk to get the goods.

So idolatry is serious business, the elements of this worship are not made-up or foolish, they stand to transmit energy from the Source. That is why they share [names](name.html) with [HaShem](hashem.html) Himself. The emptiness in idolatry is the belief that the intermediaries are a source of power in themselves.

# V. Conclusion

There are vestiges of idolatry in the [world](worlds.html). They are found in young children (who are too young to [speak](mashal.html)), dogs, and people who are so insane that they are unable to [speak](mashal.html).

An idolater is [one](one.html) who knows that there is a source, but he does not go to the source. He goes to the [one](one.html) who can deliver the goods. He is not interested in the source. He is interested in the goods.

Idolatry is going to the right source, but stopping when they get to the intermediaries, the piplelines. That is why the false G-ds have the various names of [HaShem](hashem.html) (except the yod-hay-vav-hay [name](name.html)[[40]](#footnote-40)). These are the names that bring the names of [HaShem](hashem.html)’s [oneness](oneness.html), as differentiated entities, into the [world](worlds.html).

In the beginning, man worshipped only [HaShem](hashem.html). Over [time](time.html) they noticed that [HaShem](hashem.html) used His servants to convey His will to the [world](worlds.html). They noticed that [HaShem](hashem.html) had servants called the [sun](hachama.html), the wind, the [moon](chodesh.html), [fire](fire.html), etc. They reasoned that these servants should be honored. Over [time](time.html), they forgot the source and worshipped and served only the servants.

This explains why [Mashiach](mashiach.html)[[41]](#footnote-41) [Yeshua](yeshua.html) is worshipped by Christians as though He was [HaShem](hashem.html). They have seen that [Yeshua](yeshua.html) can deliver [salvation](salvation.html), which is from [HaShem](hashem.html), and have decided to look to the clerk who can deliver the goods instead of looking to The Owner, The Source – [HaShem](hashem.html).

John chapter [one](one.html) is clear that [Yeshua](yeshua.html) is The Word. It also makes clear that there must be a speaker of The Word. That speaker is [HaShem](hashem.html). The Word is the servant who brings down what [HaShem](hashem.html) has decreed. The Word is *not* the source! Worshipping [Yeshua](yeshua.html) is a form of avodah zarah, the worship of a false G-d. We looked extensively into the Nazarean Codicil to understand worship as it applies to [Yeshua](yeshua.html) in a [study](study.html) titled: [YESHUA](yeshua.html).

The idol worshipper uses the idol, the graven image, to focus on the energy that is [coming](coming.html) down. He does not see the idol as the source of the power. Neither does he look to the ultimate source – [HaShem](hashem.html). Instead he looks to an intermediate source that can deliver what he [wants](needs.html). The idol is the focus of this intermediate energy. The idol represents the force that can deliver what he [wants](needs.html)!

Graven images are almost always in the image of a man. Why is this? An idol worshipper worships himself. He sees no need for anyone else because he can get what he [wants](needs.html) for himself. Consequently his idol, his graven image resembles himself.

A tzaddik has [HaShem](hashem.html) [standing](mashal.html) over him, whilst an idolater stands over his G-d. A tzaddik serves [HaShem](hashem.html) whereas an idolater serves himself and has his G-ds serve him. He has made himself to be [HaShem](hashem.html).

[***Midrash***](orallaw.html) ***Rabbah - Genesis LXIX:3*** *The* [*wicked*](wicked.html) *stand over their G-ds, as it says, And Pharaoh* [*dreamed*](dreams.html)*, and, behold, he stood over the river (Gen. XLI, 1);[[42]](#footnote-42) but the G-d of the righteous stands over them, as it says, AND, BEHOLD, THE LORD STOOD OVER HIM, etc.[[43]](#footnote-43)*

\* \* \*

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1. Literally “foreign worship”. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mirriam-Webster [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. AKA New Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “*Letters to a Buddhist Jew*” (pg 49-62) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. An acronym for: Torah, Neviim, and Ketuvim – The [Law](law.html), The Prophets, and The Writings. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Anshei Keneset HaGedolah [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Yoma 69b [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In Succah 52a [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Yetzer HaRa = the evil inclination [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In Yoma 69b [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. כְּנֶסֶת הַגְּדוֹלָה‎ אַנְשֵׁי  [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Yoma 69b [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Nehemiah 9:4. This was on the fast-day held by the newly established community in Palestine. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This also proves that it had a strong hold upon them. (5) A parasang is 8000 cubits. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Zechariah 5: 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Through the imprisonment of the Tempter sexual lust was dormant throughout creation. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Lit.. ‘half and half’. That it may arouse only legitimate sexual desire. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Nehemiah 9:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The evil desire, tempter of idolatry. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For resisting him successfully Israel would be rewarded. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. I.e., I agree with you: you spoke the truth. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Zechariah 5:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Zechariah 5:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The evil desire, for idolatry is also the evil desire for immorality. The two were found to go hand in hand. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Whereas there is no good in idolatry there is at least some good in the desire for [sex](marriageact.html) indulgence. Perpetuation of the race depends upon it. So does human [food](food.html). The people who found themselves with the opportunity to destroy the temptation of flesh-love discovered that, when the genius of sex-love is cancelled, no eggs are available. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. To ask that temptation or the tempter should live, but not tempt, is to ask a thing that Heaven will not grant. The tempter lives to tempt. But by depriving its flame of its major glare, by keeping it within lawful limits, one promotes domesticity and prevents depravity. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Lit., ‘against relatives’. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Sanhedrin 102b [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. I.e., the lecture on a particular day ended when ‘Three Kings’ of supra XI,1, was reached. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. This was a playful reference to the [three](three.html) kings, who were scholars. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. The blessing for bread, on account of its ending ‘who bringest forth (ha-mozi) bread from the earth.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. He was jeering at R. Ashi as not worthy of being called his colleague. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. I.e., a piece of the outer surface must be taken for the purpose, not the inner dough. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. In an evil sense, as the Talmud proceeds to quote. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Prov. 17:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Psalm 103:13; so translated here (Rashi). Cf. ibid. 18:2: I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Lit. ”those who say” or “those who tell over”. These were renowned Jewish scholars who “said” or “told over” the teachings of the [Oral Law](orallaw.html), from about 200 to 500 CE in [Babylon](bavel.html)and the [Land of Israel](city.html). Their legal discussions and debates were eventually codified in the [Gemara](orallaw.html).  [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Malachim [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. This name is never given to false G-ds because it is the name of HaShem’s oneness. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. I am using Mashiach without further qualification, to apply to Mashiach ben [Joseph](joseph.html), which is not the normal Jewish way. The normal Jewish way is to that an ‘mashiach’ without qualification always applies to Mashiach ben David only. See Rambam’s *Hilchot Melachim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Sc. the Nile, which the Egyptians worshipped. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Y.T.: idolaters must stand over and protect their deities, whereas the the G-d protects his adherents. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)