

Parashas

RE'EH

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Before starting, I just published a new book called, "House of God," b"H. I had not planned to write it but it was set in motion by a question about the Third Temple. The book seemed to practically write itself, and even AI was impressed giving it a 9.5/10 for a book of its kind. If you want to better understand what it was like to have the Temple, and to get one again, read the book. This time I say it as a reader, not the writer. Order it directly through Amazon or Thirtysix.org.

The Torah tells us that man was made in the image of God. Then man sinned with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, absorbed the yetzer hara, and has been working on making God in the image of man ever since. Enosh may have been the first one to worship false Gods, but the possibility of that error came from that first sin.

Avodah Zarah, or idol worship, is the most severe sin. It is one of the only few you can actually commit without doing anything other than thinking. Rashi, in this week's parsha, brings the

midrash that says accepting idol worship is tantamount to rejecting all of Torah, even if you're doing all the rest of the mitzvos correctly.

And lest a person say, "Who worships wood and stones today?" they should know that it doesn't make a difference whether you do or not. The moment you ascribe control over anything in Creation to anything but God, you are guilty of idol worship. Just like our currency today is different than it was two thousand years ago, but money is money, likewise are idols may be more sophisticated today, but idol worship is still idol worship.

For example, if a quantum supercomputer confirms that the universe was designed, and a scientist chooses to make mathematics the "designer" and not God, that's idol worship. God may have created mathematics to make our universe, not the other way around.

Another great way to reveal where one holds with the issue of worshipping, or at least giving credibility to idols, is in politics. People may say that they know God runs the world and that politicians are puppets in His hands. But it doesn't sound like that when you hear them speak about leaders or their politics. They sound as if they believe, at least on an emotional level, that politicians can act independently of the will of God, condemning the politician rather than asking, "Why is God using this politician to do what seems like a bad thing?"

Parnassah is another one. Yes, God signs all paychecks. At least, that's what believers say. But when they miss one, or it is short, or they feel they deserve a raise they didn't get, they get angry at humans, as if to say, "Hey, if it were up to God, He wouldn't have made that mistake. You're the one to blame!"

It's tricky. We're expected to make efforts to survive and take

care of ourselves. The more bitachon and emunah a person has, the less they have to make physical efforts. God, to reward a person's trust in Him, will fill in the gaps. But too many people disguise their lack of trust and faith in God with what they call "hishtadalus," responsible effort. They're really just reducing God's role in their lives so they can instead rely on things they can see and think they can control.

Just like we said last week that there are no shortcuts to wisdom, and when you take one, you end up with "artificial intelligence," likewise there are no shortcuts to bitachon and emunah. If you're taking one, more than likely you are guilty of idol worship on some level, and that's serious. What could be worse than doing all those mitzvos only to find out in the end they didn't count because you were considered to have rejected Torah?

God is patient. He's incredibly understanding. He knows that people need time to learn and develop spiritually. And He'll wait, as long as He sees someone is trying to tackle the problem. He loves people who are self-honest, and He'll put up with their mistakes when He knows that their self-honesty will eventually show them the truth.

But to pretend that the problem doesn't exist? Avoid dealing with the issue? Well, that's a whole other story, one that we have to start thinking about how to write with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur just weeks away, b"H.

Have a great Shabbos,

Pinchas Winston