

PARSHAS VA'ESCHANAN

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(Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11)

No Pain, No Gain

You shall not recognize the G-ds of others in my presence. (Deut. 5:7)

In the olden days idol worship was an issue. Every human being had an urge that he desperately needed to bow down to an idol. Today that is not the case. To the contrary, we view bowing down to sticks and stones as foolish. How are the Torah's numerous warnings against idol worship relevant today?

Idol worship began with Enosh, the grandson of Adam. Enosh believed in G-d; after all his grandfather was created by G-d Himself! However, the people of his generation were awestruck by the stars and galaxies and felt that they should honor the heavenly bodies as G-d's emissaries to the world, just as it is proper to honor the ministers of a king. They did so with the wholehearted intention of fulfilling G-d's will. However, they also sought to manipulate the heavenly bodies to serve themselves - and they knew the secrets that enabled them to do so. While it is true that idols were unable to function independently of G-d - for they received their power from Him - they were able to accomplish things that people wanted them to accomplish. If G-d made a drought the idol worshippers were able to manipulate nature and cause it to rain.(1)

What is evil about idol worship is that the purpose of creation is to get closer to G-d through self-perfection. Manipulating systems that involve no growth is defeating the purpose of creation. G-d makes a drought since he wants you to improve yourself and make a connection with Him.

When G-d gives us a challenge, sending an obstacle our way, we might search for a quick fix. However, what G-d wants is that we improve ourselves. Use that pain, that challenge, as a vehicle to advance in your spirituality. Seeking the easy way out is a form of idolatry. It's defeating the purpose of creation. When an obstacle comes your way you need to ask: "Do I look at challenges as an annoying inconvenience or as an opportunity for growth?" (2)

NOTES

- 1. The Gra cites Rishonim who say that Idols actually had a power and were able to accomplish things.**
- 2. R' Yitzchak Berkovits.**