

KosherTorah School

for Biblical, Judaic & Spiritual Studies

P.O. Box 628

Tellico Plains, TN, 37385

tel. 423-253-3555

email. koshertorah@wildblue.net

www.KosherTorah.com

Ariel Bar Tzadok, Director, Rabbi



Idolatry, the Modern Mind Flu

by Ariel B. Tzadok

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Yes, idolatry is still with us, and the vast majority of us, especially among the religious, (Jewish and otherwise), are practitioners of subtle forms of idolatry, and don't even know it!

According to a number of Rabbinic opinions, the fundamental purpose of Torah is the eradication of idolatry. Maimonides enumerates in his Guide to the Perplexed how all the commandments of the Torah were designed with this specific intent, to educate the nascent Israelite community, and to teach them how to be different from their idolatrous neighbors. Needless to say, Biblical history records that the ancient Israelites had serious problems with confronting idolatry.

There are those today who want to boldly proclaim that idolatry is no longer a problem. The lust after idolatry, they say, was long ago removed, since the days of the destruction of Solomon's Temple. Yet, the only type of idolatry that has ceased is the superficial, cultural type. Throughout the centuries, cultural, and ethnic embrace of outside spiritual images has been considered taboo. If idolatry was only a superficial expression of ethnic identity, then it might be argued that the ancient Biblical lust after idol worship has ceased.

But, idolatry is not that simple. The superficial, cultural expressions of idolatry only mask a much deeper, psychological reality. For idolatry is not a cultural, or ethnic struggle, rather, it is a psychological struggle.

Idolatry is a state of mind, and certainly transcends religion. Idolatry exists as a perspective, and outlook. Idolatry is a way of looking out at the world, and trying to make sense of things. The psychological battle against idolatry is far from over.

Psychological idolatry can still reside in the heart of every human being. As long as psychological idolatry remains, the commandments of the Torah seem to not be fulfilling their role for which they were ordained. This is because along with the psychology of idolatry not being understood, so too is the psychology of the commandments equally misunderstood.

The Torah was indeed ordained to provide a system of justice for the ancient Israelite people. But Torah has always been more than just a legal code. Torah encompasses the

wholeness of life, and proclaims bold messages about our inherent humanity, and the integral worth of human beings.

With regards to God, Torah proclaims a message, which was rather radical in its day. Torah stated that all reality is ultimately a holistic Singularity, with everything being connected to everything else, similar to individual parts of a singular body. God (Creator), in this sense, is the Mind, or the Spirit, which manifests within that “body” (creation).

Being that the whole of creation is considered the manifestation of the Singular Mind/Soul, no individual part of that whole should be isolated to represent the whole in general. Such specifications of application are inherently dangerous, in that by applying the value of the whole on to a singular part, we mistakenly elevate that singular part, and ascribe to it greater power than it deserves, and that it can handle. This is the foundational source of imbalance.

Imbalance in one thing leads to imbalances in all things. In a singular creation, this is a very dangerous thing. Therefore, being able to identify the Singularity as a whole, and the individual parts for what they are, is an essential foundation for a proper world outlook.

The purpose of Torah was to teach just this, the Singularity, the Singularity of creation, and the singularity of humanity. It is only when the singularity of humanity is forgotten that one group rises against another to commit atrocities of violence against them. This is the real ugly face of idolatry in action, and the greatest offense against the Divine Creator.

The psychologist Erich Fromm very eloquently summarized psychological idolatry.¹ His words ring true, as if they were spoken by a Biblical prophet.

“The Old Testament, and particularly the Prophets, are as much concerned with the negative, and fight against idolatry, as they are with the positive, the recognition of God.

Are we still concerned with the problem of idolatry?

Only when we find that certain “primitives” worship idols of wood and stone do we show such concern. We picture ourselves as being far above such worship and as having solved the problem of idolatry because we do not see ourselves worshipping any of these traditional symbols of idolatry.

We forget that the essence of idolatry is not the worship of this or that particular idol but is a specifically human attitude.

This attitude may be described as the deification of things, or partial aspects of the world and man's submission to such things, in contrast to an attitude in which his life is devoted to the realization of the highest principles of life, those of love and reason, to the aim of becoming what he potentially is, a being made in the likeness of God.

It is not only pictures in stone and wood that are idols.

Words can become idols, and machines can become idols; leaders, the state, power, and political groups may also serve.

*Science and the opinion of one's neighbors can become idols, **and God has become***

1 [Psychoanalysis and Religion](#), Yale University Press, 1950, pages 117-119

an idol for many.

While it is not possible for man to make valid statements about the positive, about God, it is possible to make statements about the negative, about idols.

Is it not time to cease to argue about God and instead to unite in the unmasking of contemporary forms of idolatry?

Today it is not Baal or Astarte but the deification of the state and the power in authoritarian countries and the deification of the machine and of success in our own culture which threaten the most precious spiritual possessions of man.

Whether we are religionists or not, whether we believe in the necessity for a new religion or in a religion of no religion or in the continuation of the Judeaean-Christian tradition, inasmuch as we are concerned with the essence and not the shell, with the experience, and not the word, with man, and not with the church, we can unite in firm negation of idolatry and find perhaps more of a common faith in this negation than in any affirmative statements about God.

Certainly we shall find more of humility and of brotherly love.”

Long ago, on Mt. Sinai, these sentiments were spoken, however, in different words. Today, the same message of Sinai echoes for all humanity to hear. We are one! Denial of this is idolatry! We are one, the universe is one, even as God is one! Denial of this is idolatry!

This is the message of Torah, and it does not matter who today is the messenger of this message. It's truth cries out to be heard, and embraced! In this way, we bring true unity (yihud), and rectification (tikkun), to ourselves, and to our world.

This above all else, is what God wants from us, the eradication of idolatry. Now that we know what it really is, we can recognize it, and take the necessary steps to dissolve it.

The KosherTorah School



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