

Worship the Father through the Sun

PARSHA INSIGHTS - SHOFTIM (5759)

Did Hashem say NOT TO serve other gods, or did He NOT SAY to serve them?

You are probably confused by the title. Allow me to explain. There are two ways to view the prohibition of worshipping the sun, moon, and angels. Did the Creator tell us not to serve them? Or perhaps, He just never told us to serve them. Rav Moshe Feinstein discusses this in our *parsha* [Torah portion].

“If there will be found among you in one of your cities which Hashem your G-d gives you, a man or woman who commits what is evil in the eyes of Hashem your G-d, to transgress His covenant, and he will go and serve gods of others and bow down to them, or to the sun or the moon or to any host of heaven, WHICH I HAVE NOT COMMANDED...” (17:2-3). *Rashi* clarifies the last phrase - it means “which I have not commanded to worship them.”

Rav Moshe wonders: We know that idolatry is punishable by stoning if there is sufficient testimony and the defendant was warned, as our verses state. For what is this capital punishment administered? It is because Hashem commanded us NOT TO serve entities which others perceive as gods (sometimes called “other gods” - gods of others, gods to which other people ascribe divinity). Legal consequences for transgressions are meted out for violating prohibitions, for going against what Hashem urged us not to do. If so, why is the wording of the *pasuk* [verse] so unusual? “He will go and serve gods of others... which I have not commanded...” It should have said “which I have commanded not to serve”!

The solution is that Hashem is sending a special message to us through this terminology. It is known that in the generation of Enosh (grandson of Adam, son of Shais - *Beraishis* [Genesis] 5:6), the people began to err after idol worship. They were under the mistaken impression that Hashem wants people to worship the prominent creations of the world, such as the sun, moon, and angels. These individuals believed fully in the existence of G-d as the Supreme Being, but they began serving celestial bodies as well. They truly felt that this was the will of Hashem.

For this reason, declares Rav Moshe, our *pasuk* expresses its idea in a unique fashion. “Or to the sun or the moon or to any host of heaven, WHICH I HAVE NOT COMMANDED...” - I never told anyone to do what Enosh and his generation undertook! Since this was never approved of as proper behavior, it is automatically considered *avoda zara* [polytheism].

We see that **the way** the Torah phrases its injunctions and warnings can teach us a great deal. This also reminds us that idolizing anything but Hashem (plus His Torah - the extension of His essence and divine intellect) can be viewed as *avoda zara*, a strange, unendorsed lifestyle. May these words inspire us to totally immerse ourselves in Torah and fear of Heaven.

By Rabbi Moshe Heigh

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