

Intermarriage-Today's Avodah Zarah
Parshas Balak and Pinchus
By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

The end of Parshas Balak and the beginning of Parshas Pinchas focus on Pinchas's act of zealotry when many of Am Yisroel were committing immoral acts. Because Pinchas killed the perpetrators totally Leshem Shamayim, the plague stopped and Pinchas was rewarded with kehuna and Hashem's Bris Shalom. He restored the Shleimus between Hashem and Klal Yisroel, We find that after Balak's plan to have a curse placed on the Klal Yisroel fails, the next tactic was get Klal Yisroel to do Avodah Zara, *lo aleinu*. We are told at the end of the Parsha that the Bnai Yisroel were behaving improperly with the daughters of Moav. What started out as just unseemly behavior led to joining these daughters of Moav in the feasts for Baal Peor and ultimately to the actual worship of this avodah zara.

We often find that there is a connection between improper relationships/intermarriage and avodah zara. We find in Shemos 24:15-16 and in Devarim 9:3-4 that the Torah forbids intermarriage not only as a prohibition in itself but the fact that it will inevitably lead to avoda zara, worship of other deities. However, today in the American Jewish society, intermarriage is a major issue but we do not see avoda zara as a result. Perhaps we can understand it simply that since avoda zara is not an issue today, it is not part of the issue of assimilation. The key issue is the assimilation itself and the threat to our identity and survival. However, it can be also be understood as avoda zara in a more subtle way. Avodah zara is not only the worship of statues or forces of nature. It can also mean worship of oneself. This self-centeredness of the latter part of twentieth century and onwards in western society, otherwise known as the 'me-generation' is also idolatrous. This type of attitude towards life is indeed worship of oneself. It states that the most or the only important thing is 'I', and that which is good for 'me,' even at the cost of other individuals, one's family, community, or nationality. One who intermarries with the claim that this person, the non-Jewish spouse, is the only one who will make him/her happy is stating that only his/her own interests matter and not the continuity of Am Yisroel and, in some cases, the feelings of the rest of the family. This total preoccupation with only making oneself happy [the what's in it for me attitude] is a modern manifestation of avoda zarah.

The foregoing thought was approved by my Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Dovid Feinstein, Shlita

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