

The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Avodah Zarah 16-22

Week of 1-7 Cheshvan 5756 / 25-31 October 1995
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Master of the Miracle

Did you ever wonder about the meaning of "Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes" which appears in the name of so many charity organizations in Israel?

The original Rabbi Meir is, of course, the great Talmudic Sage, and the following story describes the miracle for which he earned the title *baal hanes* — the master of the miracle.

In order to free his wife's sister from forced confinement in a Roman house of shame Rabbi Meir bribed her guard with a large sum of money, half of which would be for him and half to be used to bribe the authorities whenever there would be an investigation. When the guard asked what he would do when he ran out of money to bribe his superiors, Rabbi Meir told him to simply say "G-d of Meir, answer me" and he would be saved. To prove the efficacy of this prayer to the skeptical guard the sage threw a stone at some dangerous man-eating dogs in the vicinity, inciting them to charge towards him. As soon as he said "G-d of Meir, answer me" they harmlessly slinked away.

The guard's deed eventually came to the attention of the king and he was sentenced to hanging. As they took him to the gallows he said "G-d of Meir, answer me" and the hanging was miraculously prevented. As he was freed from the gallows he was asked to explain the miracle and he revealed that its source was Rabbi Meir. The angry Romans launched a massive manhunt throughout Israel for Rabbi Meir but he miraculously eluded capture and eventually fled to the safety of Babylon.

Avodah Zarah 18a-b

The Magic Elixir

When Rabbi Alexandri announced "Who wants to live?" everyone came flocking to him clamoring "Give us life!"

The sage produced no bottles of magic elixir, only a Book of Psalms from which he read King David's counsel: "*Who is the man who wants to live...guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.*" (Psalm 34:13-14)

Should anyone gain the false impression that the sage's prescription for life required a complete withdrawal from normal living — a "going to sleep" in order to avoid the inevitable temptations of improper speech — Rabbi Alexandri called his audience's attention to the passage (34:15) which follows: "*Turn away from evil and do good.*" This, he explained, means that the study of Torah, which King Solomon in Proverbs describes as a "good" acquisition, will protect a person from misusing his power of speech and allow him to continue living normally while he achieves his goal of gaining life.

Avodah Zarah 19b

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