

If they would have flogged the image, they would have bowed to the image - **אילמלי נגדוה לחנניה מישאל ועזריה הו פלחי לצלמא**

Overview

The Gemara tries to prove that מיתה may be more severe than מלקות based on a statement from רב that if they would have flogged חמו"ע (instead of throwing them into a furnace to die) they would have bowed to the graven image. תוספות discusses this issue.

תוספות asks:

תִּימָה מֵנֶא לֵן¹ דְּהָא אֲמַרִּינן בְּהִרְוָא (ברכות סא, ב) כִּשְׁהוּצִיאוּ אֶת רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא² -
It is astounding! How did רב know this that if they were flogged, they would have bowed down?! [and furthermore] since the גמרא relates in פרק הירואה when **they took our ר"ע** to execute him -

אמר כל ימי הייתי מצטער על פסוק זה אימתי יבא לידי ואקיימנו בכל נפשך³ -
said, 'when will I have the opportunity so I can fulfill the נפשך' of פסוק, 'all my days I was pained regarding this נפשך' -

אלמא משמע דבכל נפשך מיירי אפילו היו מייסרין את האדם ביסורין קשין⁴ -
Evidently implying that בכל נפשך is even in a case where they are torturing a person with severe torture -

דומיא דרבי עקיבא שהיו מסרקין בשרו במסרקי ברזל וכל שכן לנגודי⁵ -
Similar to the situation of ר"ע where they were combing his flesh with iron combs, and certainly one must fulfill נפשך if he is merely being flogged!

תוספות answers:

ואומר רבינו תם דאותו צלם לא היה עבודת כוכבים ממש אלא היה עשוי לכבוד המלך -
And the ר"ת says, that image was not an actual idol, but rather it was an image made in honor of the king, therefore if one bowed to it he did not violate the prohibition of idol worship -

¹ The הגהות הב"ה amends this to read, לֵן וְעוֹד דְּהָא (instead of לֵן דְּהָא).

² The גמרא there relates that they were combing his flesh with iron combs and ר"ע at that time was accepting upon himself מלכות שמים (reciting the שמע). His students said to him, 'עד כאן' (to such an extent does one need to be מקבל מלכות שמים, even under such dire circumstances) to which ר"ע responded as follows.

³ The פסוק (דברים [ואתחנן] ו, ה) reads ואהבת וגו' בכל נפשך, which is interpreted to mean that one must love ה', even if his life is taken from him (on account of this love).

⁴ Nevertheless, he must be strong in his faith, despite the tremendous pain one is enduring.

⁵ How can רב say that חמו"ע would have succumbed to flogging and bowed to an idol, when it is incumbent that one remains steadfast with ה' in the face of much greater pain. See 'Thinking it over' # 1.

ואף על פי כן היה בו קידוש השם⁶ ולכך מסרו עצמן למיתה -

But nevertheless, by not bowing to it, there was a sanctification of ה', so therefore they were willing to give up their lives, for the קידוש השם

תוספות proves his point

והיינו דכתיב (דניאל ג') לאלהך לית אנן פלחין ולצלם דהבא די אקימת לא נסגוד -

And this is what is written that חמו"ע said to נבוכדנצר, 'we will not worship your g-d, and we will not bow down to the golden image which you erected' -

משמע שהצלם לא היה תופס באלהות⁸ -

This indicates that the image was not considered as a deity –

תוספות has some difficulty with this answer:

ומיהו פלחו לצלמא משמע שהצלם היה עבודת כוכבים⁹ מדקאמר פלחו:

However, the expression the גמרא uses here, 'פלחו לצלמא', indicates that the צלם was indeed an ע"ז since the גמרא stated פלחו!

Summary

It is possible to say that this צלם was not an ע"ז (even though we say לצלמא).

Thinking it over

What is the proof from ר"ע; no one was forcing ר"ע to worship idols; they were punishing him for teaching תורה, and while suffering he was מקבל מלכות שמים¹⁰. How can we infer from this that one would not (should not) worship ע"ז (even) if he is tortured?!

2. If the צלם was not ע"ז¹¹, what is the קדה"ש in not bowing to it?¹²

⁶ See 'Thinking it over' # 2.

⁷ פסוק יח.

⁸ The word 'פלחין' indicates worshipping a deity, however the word נסגוד refers to (merely) bowing out of respect, as one bows before a king, but not as a deity. Regarding the צלם the used the term נסגוד, indicating that it was not a deity.

⁹ See footnote # 8.

¹⁰ See footnote # 5.

¹¹ See footnote # 6.

¹² See נמוקי יוסף and רמב"ן.