

GOOD HUMOR

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

These are the chronicles of Terach: Terach fathered Avram. (Bereshith 11:27)

Terach was a professional idol salesman. One day he had to go out of town, and he left his son Avram in charge of his shop. A customer entered the shop with a handful of fine flour to offer as a sacrifice to the idols. Avram, who had already begun to recognize the futility of idolatry, took a hammer and smashed all the idols except the largest one. When his father returned, he told him that there had been an uproar among the idols over who should get the offering, until the largest one took a hammer and smashed all of them. Furious, Terach sent Avram to Nimrod to be killed.⁽¹⁾

Under such circumstances Avram was not expected to relay to Terach what had actually transpired. Since it was clear that his father would be enraged when he saw his entire enterprise destroyed, why didn't he give him a more believable excuse? Why did he have to make matters worse by fabricating such an absurd story? Furthermore, since mockery is generally viewed as an extremely harmful trait⁽²⁾, how could he employ such tactics?

All forms of mockery are forbidden except for that of idol worship.⁽³⁾ In order to comprehend why it is permitted to mock idols, it is first necessary to understand why ridicule is usually a serious offense. When a person makes fun of someone, he causes irreparable damage by disgracing him. Speaking publicly makes matters worse, because he is undermining any possible benefit that could come to the object of his scorn. Since idol worship is complete falsehood, for these reasons it is actually beneficial to mock idol worship. Furthermore, when someone mocks another person, implicit in his words is a derision of God, for everything and everyone has a Divine source.⁽⁴⁾ Since idolatry claims to be independent from God, this is not applicable. Avram therefore set up this absurd scenario in order to show the world the true nature of idol worship.

1. *Bereshith Rabbah* 38:19.

2. Sotah 42a.

3. Megilah 25b.

4. Sha'arei Teshuvah 3:174-176.

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