“Do not turn to the idols, and molten gods shall you not make for yourselves.” (19:4)

Rashi’s explanation of the *pasuk* conveys a profound message. The *elil*, idol, is nothing. It is man-made and has no powers. Yet, explains *Rashi*, if someone is foolish enough to turn to this *elil*, he will slowly begin to respect it and, before he realizes it, it will have become a god to him. *Rashi* is teaching us, says *Horav Yerucham Levovitz, z.l.,* that idols are *gods made by man*. At first they are nothing, and man knows that they are nothing. Regrettably, however, it does not remain that way. *He* transforms them into a god!

Idolatry is a relative term, because what one worships is apt to change with time and place. Every society places its emphasis on a variety of vacuous items or values. These, in turn, become idols for some people, because if one respects them long enough, he will begin to worship them. Let us look at materialism, for which money is the god-head. There are people who worship money, who are totally subjugated to it. How did money become so important? How did it develop the power to control the entire lives and destinies of people who used to be intelligent? The answer is that the very people who became its subject endowed it with power. They made it into an idol.

Once, the *Alter m*’Slabodka grabbed a hold of a handful of coins. In a raised voice, he exclaimed to his students, “You are playing with broken shards!” He was teaching them about the insignificance of money by comparing it to broken shards of earthenware. Their desire for money and the material things it could buy was transforming these shards into an obsession. They were becoming its subjects. At the same time, if we would approach a wealthy man who is already considerably old and tell him what the *Alter* said, that the money he has amassed and with which he is still obsessed, is worthless, he would laugh at us – even at his advanced age when he should be thinking about more spiritual values. How do we reconcile his line of thinking more about the material with the *Alter’s* approach? It appears that these two points of view are as antagonistic to one another as they are extreme.

The answer lies in our original idea: man creates his own *avodah zarah*, idol. For some, it is a molten god; for others, it is money; and, yet for others, it is a sport, a vocation, or field of endeavor in which one venerates an ideal or object to the point that it becomes deified in his eyes. The wealthy man has placed his material assets above his own spiritual values. He was no longer able to fathom the insignificance of his wealth, especially in light of the fact that at his advanced age, his spiritual orientation was of great consequence.