

הלכות עבודת פוכבים • פרק שני

Learned like the daf, the literal words in bold, flowing with the elucidation

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, we delve into the very heart of the prohibition against avodah zarah, learning that Hashem forbade us from serving any created being whatsoever. Even if a person knows in his heart that Hashem is the true Elokim, bowing down to a star, an angel, or any of the elements as an intermediary—just as the generation of Enosh mistakenly did—is still considered actual idol worship. The Torah warns us to guard our thoughts with great yiras Shamayim, so that the "eye of the heart" does not lead us astray to view these creations as independent powers.

To protect our neshamos from the spiritual poison of heresy, the Torah also commands us to distance ourselves completely from the books and ideas of the idolaters. We are forbidden from reading their texts, contemplating their practices, or even looking at the images of their idols. The Rambam teaches us that we must not inquire about their rites even out of mere curiosity, as such thoughts can easily drag a person down and cause him to copy their ways, chas v'shalom.

All introductions, summaries, and contextual notes are the editor's commentary and are not part of the original text.

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • The Prohibition to Worship Any Creation Even as an Intermediary

עקר הצווי בעבודת פוכבים

The essence of the commandment regarding worship of stars

שלא לעבד אחד מכל הברואים

is not to serve one of all the creations,

לא מלאך ולא גלגל ולא פוכב

not an angel, and not a sphere, and not a star,

ולא אחד מארבעה היסודות

and not one of the four elements,

ולא אחד מכל הנבראים מהן.

and not one of all the entities created from them.

ואף על פי שהעובד יודע שה' הוא האלהים

And even though the worshiper knows that Hashem, He is the God,

והוא עובד הנברא הזה

and he serves this creation

על דרך שעבד אנוש ואנשי דורו תחלה

in the manner that worshiped Enosh and the people of his generation originally,

הרי זה עובד כוכבים.

behold, this is a worshiper of stars.

וענין זה הוא שהזהירה תורה עליו ואמרה

And the matter of this is what the Torah warned about and said:

דברים ד יט "ופן תשא עיניך השמימה וראית את השמש" וגו'

"And lest you lift your eyes heavenward and you see the sun" etc.,

דברים ד יט "אשר חלק ה' אלהיך אתם לכל העמים".

"which Hashem your God apportioned them to all the nations."

כלומר שמה תשוט בעין לבך

Meaning to say, lest you wander with the eye of your heart

ותראה שאלו הן המנהיגים את העולם

and you see that these, they are the leaders of the world,

והם שחלק ה' אותם לכל העולם

and they are what Hashem apportioned to all the world

להיות חיים והוים ואינם נפסדים כמנהגו של עולם

to be alive and existing and not perishing like the custom of the world,

ותאמר שראוי להשתחוות להם ולעבדן.

and you will say that it is worthy to bow down to them and to serve them.

ובענין הזה צוה ואמר

And regarding this matter He commanded and said:

דברים יא טז "השמרו לכם פן יפתה לבבכם".

"Be careful for yourselves lest your heart will be enticed."

כלומר שלא תטעו בהרהור הלב

Meaning to say, that you do not err in the thought of the heart

לעבד אלו להיות סרסור ביניכם ובין הבורא:

to serve these to be an intermediary between you and the Creator.

הלכה ב

Halacha 2 · The Prohibition of Reading Books of Idol Worship and Inquiring into Its Rites

ספרים רבים חפרו עובדי כוכבים בעבודתה

Many books were composed by the worshipers of stars concerning its service,

היאך עקר עבודתה ומה מעשיה ומשפטיה.

explaining how is the essence of its service, and what are its practices and its statutes.

צונו הקדוש ברוך הוא שלא לקרות באותן הספרים כלל

Therefore, the Holy One, blessed is He, commanded us not to read in those books at all,

ולא נהרהר בה ולא בדבר מדבריה.

and we shall not think about it, nor about any matter of its matters.

ואפילו להסתכל בדמות הצורה אסור

And even to look at the likeness of the image of an idol is forbidden,

שנאמר "אל תפנו אל האלילים".

as it is said in the Torah, "Do not turn to the idols."

ובענין הזה נאמר "ופן תדרש לאלהיהם לאמר איכה יעבדו",

And in this matter it is said, "And lest you seek concerning their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve them?'"

שלא תשא אל על דרך עבודתה היאך היא

This warns that you shall not inquire about the way of its service, how it is performed,

אף על פי שאין אתה עובדה,

even though you do not serve it yourself.

שדבר זה גורם להפנות אחריה

The reason is for this matter causes a person to turn after it

ולעשות כמה שהן עושין

and to do like what they do,

שנאמר ואעשה כן גם אני:

as it is said at the end of that verse, "and I will do so also I."

וְכָל הַלְאוֹיִן הָאֵלֵּי פְעֻנָּן אֶחָד הֵן

And all of these prohibitions mentioned in the previous halachos are in one concept,

וְהוּא שֶׁלֹא יִפְנֶה אַחֵר עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים

and it is that one should not turn after the worship of stars;

וְכָל הַנִּפְנֶה אַחֲרֶיהָ בְּדֶרֶךְ שֶׁהוּא עוֹשֶׂה בּוֹ מַעֲשֶׂה הָרִי זֶה לוֹקָה.

and anyone who turns after it in a way that he does an action in it, behold, this one receives lashes.

וְלֹא עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים בְּלֶבֶד הוּא שֶׁאִסוּר לְהִפְנוֹת אַחֲרֶיהָ בְּמַחֲשָׁבָה

And not worship of stars alone is it that is forbidden to turn after in thought,

אֲלֵא כָּל מַחֲשָׁבָה שֶׁהוּא גּוֹרֵם לוֹ לְאַדָּם לְעַקֵּר עֵקֶר מִעֲקָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה

rather, any thought that causes a person to uproot a principle from the principles of the Torah,

מִזְהַרִּין אָנוּ שֶׁלֹא לְהַעֲלוֹתָהּ עַל לִבֵּנוּ

we are warned not to bring it up upon our heart,

וְלֹא נִסְיַח דַּעְתָּנוּ לְכָה וְנַחֲשֹׁב וְנִמְשֵׁךְ אַחֵר הִרְהוּרֵי הַלֵּב.

and we shall not divert our mind to this and think and be drawn after the thoughts of the heart.

מִפְּנֵי שֶׁדַּעְתּוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם קְצָרָה

This is because the mind of man is limited,

וְלֹא כָּל הַדַּעוֹת יְכוּלִין לְהַשִּׁיג הָאֱמֶת עַל בְּרִיּוֹ.

and not all minds are able to comprehend the truth upon its clarity.

וְאִם יִמָּשֶׁךְ כָּל אָדָם אַחֵר מַחֲשָׁבוֹת לִבּוֹ

And if every man will be drawn after the thoughts of his heart,

נִמְצָא מַחְרִיב אֶת הָעוֹלָם לְפִי קֹצֵר דַּעְתּוֹ.

he is found destroying the world according to the limitation of his mind.

כִּיצַד.

How so?

פְּעָמִים יְתוּר אַחֵר עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים

Sometimes he will stray after the worship of stars,

ופעמים יחשב ביחוד הבורא שמה הוא שמה אינו.

and sometimes he will think about the oneness of the Creator, perhaps He is, perhaps He is not;

מה למעלה ומה למטה מה לפניו ומה לאחור.

what is above and what is below, what is before and what is behind.

ופעמים בנבואה שמה היא אמת שמה היא אינה.

And sometimes in prophecy, perhaps it is truth, perhaps it is not.

ופעמים בתורה שמה היא מן השמים שמה אינה.

And sometimes in the Torah, perhaps it is from Heaven, perhaps it is not.

ואינו יודע המדות שידין בהן עד שידע האמת על בריו

And he does not know the measures with which he should judge until he will know the truth upon its clarity,

ונמצא יוצא לידי מינות.

and he is found going out to the hands of heresy.

ועל ענין זה הזהירה תורה ונאמר בה במדבר טו לט "ולא תתרו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם אשר אתם זנים".

And upon this matter the Torah warned, and it is said in it, "And do not stray after your heart and after your eyes which you go astray after."

כלומר לא ימשך כל אחד מכם אחר דעתו הקצרה

Meaning, each one of you shall not be drawn after his limited mind,

וידמה שמחשבתו משגת האמת.

and imagine that his thought comprehends the truth.

כה אמרו חכמים גמרא ברכות יב ב "אחרי לבבכם זו מינות ואחרי עיניכם זו זנות.

Thus said the Sages: "'After your heart'—this is heresy; 'and after your eyes'—this is immorality."

ולאו זה אף על פי שהוא גורם לאדם לטרונו מן העולם הבא

And this prohibition, even though it causes a person to banish him from the World to Come,

אין בו מלקות:

there are no lashes for it because it does not involve a physical action.

מצות עבודת כוכבים כנגד המצות כולן היא

The commandment of the prohibition of worship of stars is equivalent to all of the commandments, all of them combined, it is so severe,

שנאמר "וכי תשגו ולא תעשו את כל המצות" וגו'

as it is said in the Torah, "And if you err and do not perform all of these commandments" etc.

ומפי השמועה למדו שעבודת כוכבים הפתוב מדבר.

And from the mouth of the tradition, our Sages learned that regarding worship of stars the verse speaks here, equating this one sin to violating all the mitzvos.

הא למדת שכל המודה בעבודת כוכבים

Behold, you have learned from this that anyone who acknowledges the truth of worship of stars

כופר בכל התורה כלה ובכל הנביאים

denies all of the Torah entirely, and all of the prophets,

ובכל מה שנצטוו הנביאים מאדם ועד סוף העולם

and all of what that were commanded the prophets from Adam and until the end of the world,

שנאמר "מן היום אשר צוה ה' והלאה לדורתיכם".

as it is said in the continuation of the verse, "from the day which commanded Hashem and onward for your generations."

וכל הכופר בעבודת כוכבים

And conversely, anyone who denies and rejects worship of stars

מודה בכל התורה כלה ובכל הנביאים

acknowledges all of the Torah entirely, and all of the prophets,

ובכל מה שנצטוו הנביאים מאדם ועד סוף העולם

and all of what that were commanded the prophets from Adam and until the end of the world,

והוא עקר כל המצות כולן:

and it is the root of all of the commandments, all of them.

ישראל שעבד עבודת כוכבים

A Jew who served worship of stars

הָרִי הוּא כְּעוֹבֵד כּוֹכָבִים לְכָל דְּבָרָיו

behold he is like a worshiper of stars for all his matters,

וְאִינוּ כִּישְׂרָאֵל שְׂעוֹכֵר עֲבֵרָה שִׁישׁ בָּהּ סָקִילָהּ.

and he is not like a Jew who transgresses a transgression that has in it stoning.

מוֹמֵר לְעִבּוּדַת כּוֹכָבִים הָרִי הוּא מוֹמֵר לְכָל הַתּוֹרָה כָּלָהּ.

An apostate to worship of stars, behold he is an apostate for all of the Torah entirely.

וְכֵן הָאֶפִיקוֹרְסִים מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֵינָן כִּישְׂרָאֵל לְדָבָר מִן הַדְּבָרִים

And likewise the heretics from Israel are not like a Jew for any matter of the matters,

וְאִין מְקַבְּלִים אוֹתָם בְּתַשׁוּבָה לְעוֹלָם

and we do not accept them in repentance ever,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר מִשְׁלֵי ב יט "כָּל בָּאִיָּהּ לֹא יָשׁוּבוֹן וְלֹא יִשְׁגּוּ אַרְחוֹת חַיִּים".

as it is said in Mishlei, "all who come to her will not return and they will not attain the paths of life."

וְהָאֶפִיקוֹרְסִים הֵם הַתָּרִים אַחֵר מִחֲשָׁבוֹת לִבָּם בְּסִכְלוֹת דְּבָרִים שְׂאֵמְרָנוּ

And the heretics, they are those who stray after the thoughts of their heart in the foolishness of matters that we said,

עַד שֶׁנִּמְצְאוּ עוֹבְרִים עַל גּוּפֵי תּוֹרָה לְהַכְעִיס בְּשֹׂאֵט נֶפֶשׁ בְּיַד רָמָה

until they are found transgressing against the bodies of Torah to anger with contempt of soul with a hand high,

וְאוֹמְרִים שֶׁאֵין בָּזָה עוֹן.

and they say that there is not in this sin.

וְאִסּוּר לְסַפֵּר עִמָּהֶן וּלְהָשִׁיב עֲלֵיהֶן תַּשׁוּבָה כָּלֵל

And it is forbidden to speak with them and to return to them an answer at all,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר מִשְׁלֵי ה ח "וְאַל תִּקְרַב אֶל פֶּתַח בֵּיתָהּ".

as it is said in Mishlei, "and do not draw near to the entrance of her house."

וּמִחֲשָׁבָה שֶׁל אֶפִיקוֹרוֹס לְעִבּוּדַת כּוֹכָבִים:

And the thought of a heretic is for worship of stars.

כל המודה בעבודת כוכבים שהיא אמת

Any who acknowledges the worship of stars, believing that it is truth,

אף על פי שלא עבדה

even though he did not actually worship it,

הרי זה מחרף ומגדף את השם הנכבד והנורא.

behold, this one disgraces and blasphemes the Name, the glorious and the awesome.

ואחד העוֹבֵד עבודת כוכבים ואחד המגדף את ה'

And both the one who worships the worship of stars, and both the one who blasphemes Hashem, are equated in the Torah,

שנאמר "והנפש אשר תעשה ביד רמה מן האזרח ומן הגר את ה' הוא מגדף".

as it is said in the Torah in Sefer Bamidbar: "And the soul that acts with a high hand, from the native and from the convert, Hashem he blasphemes."

לפיכך תולין עובד עבודת כוכבים כמו שתולין את המגדף

Therefore, we hang a worshipper of the worship of stars, just as we hang the blasphemer,

ושניהם נסקלין.

and both of them are stoned by Beis Din.

ומפני זה כללתי דין המגדף בהלכות עבודת כוכבים

And because of this, I included the law of the blasphemer in the Laws of the worship of stars,

ששניהם כופרים בעקרם:

since both of them are deniers of the fundamental principle of our emunah.

ואלו הן דיני המגדף.

And these are the laws of the blasphemer:

אין המגדף חייב סקילה

The blasphemer is not liable to stoning

עד שיפרש את השם המיוחד של ארבע אותיות

until he pronounces — the Unique Name of four letters,

שהוא אָל

which is Aleph Dalet Nun Yod,

ויְבָרַךְ אוֹתוֹ בְּשֵׁם מִן הַשְּׁמוֹת שֶׁאֵינָם נִמְחָקִים

and curses it with a Name from the Names that are not erased,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וְנִקָּב שֵׁם ה'",

as it is said in the Torah, "And he who blasphemes the Name of Hashem shall surely be put to death."

עַל הַשֵּׁם הַמֵּיחָד חַיֵּב סָקִילָה

Thus, for blaspheming the Unique Name, he is liable to stoning,

וְעַל שָׂאָר הַכְּנוּיִים בְּאִזְהָרָה.

and for the rest of the appellations, he violates a prohibition but is not stoned.

וַיֵּשׁ מִי שֶׁמְפָרֵשׁ שֶׁאֵינוֹ חַיֵּב אֶלָּא עַל שֵׁם יוֹ

And there is one who explains that he is not liable to stoning except for blaspheming the Name Yod Heh Vav Heh,

וְאֲנִי אוֹמֵר שֶׁעַל שְׁנֵיהֶם הוּא נִסְקָל:

and I say that for both of them, whether he blasphemed the Name Aleph Dalet Nun Yod or the Name Yod Heh Vav Heh, he is stoned.

הַלָּכָה ח

Halacha 8 · The Warning Against Blasphemy and the Procedure for Examining the Witnesses

אִזְהָרָה שֶׁל מַגִּדֵּף מִצִּיּוֹן

The warning in the Torah of a blasphemer, prohibiting this sin, is from where do we derive it? It is

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר שְׁמוֹת כָּב כֹּז "אֱלֹהִים לֹא תִקְלָל".

as it is said in the pasuk in Shemos 22:27, "God, you shall not curse."

בְּכָל יוֹם וַיּוֹם בּוֹדְקִין אֶת הָעֵדִים בְּכְנוּיִים

During the trial, on every day and day of the cross-examination, they examine the witnesses with nicknames, substituting a pseudonym for the Holy Name so they do not utter a blasphemy in court, using the formula:

יִפֶּה יוֹסֵי אֶת יוֹסֵי.

"May Yosse strike Yosse," where "Yosse" is used as a substitute for Hashem's Name.

נִגְמַר הַדִּין

Once **the judgment is finished** and they are ready to render the verdict, they must hear the exact words of blasphemy. Therefore,

מוציאין את כל אדם לחוץ

they remove every person outside the courtroom, so that the Holy Name is not desecrated in public,

ושואלים את הגדול שבָּעֵדִים

and they ask the greatest, most prominent who is among the witnesses,

ואומרים לו אמר מה ששמעת בפרוש

and they say to him, "Say what you heard explicitly," using the actual Name that was blasphemed,

והוא אומר

and he says it.

והדיינים עומדים על רגליהם וקורעין ולא מאחין.

Upon hearing the blasphemy, **the judges stand on their feet and rend** their garments in mourning, **and** these tears they **do not mend** ever again.

והעד השני אומר אף אני כמותו שמעתי.

And the second witness says, "Even I, like him, heard it," without having to repeat the explicit Name.

ואם היו עדים רבים

And if there were many witnesses,

צריה כל אחד ואחד מהן לומר כזה שמעתי:

every one and one of them needs to say, "Like this I heard."

הלכה ט

Halacha 9 · The Law of a Blasphemer Who Retracts and One Who Blasphemes with an Idol's Name

מגדף שחזר בו בתוך כדי דבור

A blasphemer who retracted his blasphemy **within the time of speaking**, which is the time it takes a disciple to greet his teacher,

אינו כלום

his retraction **is nothing** and does not save him from punishment,

אלא כיון שגדף בעדים נסקל.

rather, once he blasphemed in the presence of **witnesses**, he is **stoned** by the Beis Din.

מי שגדף את השם בשם עבודת כוכבים

One who blasphemed the Name of Hashem with the name of an idol of worship of stars, by using the idol's name to curse Hashem,

קנאים פוגעים בו והורגים אותו.

zealots who are filled with holy wrath for Hashem's honor may strike him and kill him on the spot.

ואם לא הרגוהו קנאים

And if the zealots did not kill him at the time of the act,

ובא לבית דין

and he came to the house of judgment to be tried,

אינו נסקל עד שיברך בשם מן השמות המיוחדים:

he is not stoned by the court until he blesses, which is a euphemism for cursing, with a name from the Names that are unique to Hashem, and not by using the name of an idol.

הלכה י

Halacha 10: The Obligation to Rend Garments for Blasphemy and Placing Hands on the Condemned

כל השומע ברפת השם חייב לקרע

Anyone who hears blasphemy of the Name of Hashem is obligated to rend his garments in mourning,

ואפילו על ברפת הפנויין חייב לקרע

and even upon blasphemy of the descriptive terms of Hashem, one is obligated to rend his garments.

והוא שישמענה מישראל.

And this is specifically when he hears it from a Jew.

אחד השומע ואחד השומע מפי השומע חייב לקרע.

Whether the direct hearer of the blasphemy or the one who hears from the mouth of the hearer who is repeating what happened, each is obligated to rend his garments.

אבל השומע מפי העובד פוכבים אינו חייב לקרע.

But one who hears it directly from the mouth of the worshiper of stars is not obligated to rend his garments.

ולא קרעו אליקים ושכנא אלא מפני שרבשקה היה ישראלי מומר.

And not did rend Elyakim and Shevna their garments when they heard the blasphemy of Ravshakeh, except because that Ravshakeh was a Jew apostate, and therefore they were obligated to rend.

כל העדים והדיינים סומכים את ידיהם אחד אחד על ראש המגיד

All the witnesses and the judges place their hands, one by one, upon the head of the blasphemer before he is executed,

וְאָמַר לוֹ דָּמְךָ בְּרֹאשְׁךָ שְׂאֵתָה גְרַמְתָּ לָּךְ.

and say to him, "Your blood is on your head, for you caused it to yourself."

וְאִין בְּכָל הַרֹגֵי בֵּית דִּין מִי שְׁסוּמִים עָלָיו אֶלָּא מְגִידָה בְּלִבָּהּ

And there is not among all those executed by the house of law anyone that they place hands upon him except the blasphemer alone,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְסָמְכוּ כָּל הַשְּׁמָעִים אֶת יָדֵיהֶם:

as it is said in the Torah regarding the blasphemer, "and shall place all the hearers their hands upon his head."

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter outlines the strict prohibitions against engaging with avodah zarah in thought, speech, or deed. We learn that any action showing interest in these false beliefs is forbidden, and one who performs an action reflecting this concern receives lashes. Ultimately, the Torah warns us to guard our minds from any thoughts or philosophical inquiries that could uproot the fundamental principles of our holy faith, ensuring our hearts remain entirely pure and devoted to Hashem alone.

לְמַעֲשֶׂה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

The core of the prohibition against avodah zarah is not just about bowing to a physical statue; it is about the subtle temptation to look for intermediaries. The Torah warns us, 'Be very careful that your heart not be tempted,' which Chazal explain as a warning not to let our thoughts wander after our own limited understanding. When we look at the natural systems of the world, our careers, our doctors, our financial efforts, or even spiritual forces, and treat them as independent powers that we must appease, we are falling into the very trap that Enosh and his generation fell into. We must remember that every single force in creation is merely an axe in the hand of the hewer, completely subservient to Hashem.

Furthermore, the Rambam teaches us a profound rule about the human mind: 'the mind of man is short.' We are forbidden from filling our heads with foreign philosophies, secular skepticism, or looking at things that pull our hearts away from pure emunah. The yetzer hara tries to convince us that we can explore every doubt and read every cynical book without being affected. But the Torah knows our nature. If you let your mind wander into places of doubt, wondering 'maybe it is true, maybe it is not', you will eventually be drawn after the desires of your heart and damage your yiras Shamayim. Guarding our thoughts is the ultimate boundary that keeps our relationship with Hashem pure.

To live this today, choose one area where you feel anxious or dependent on a human intermediary, whether it is a business partner, a medical treatment, or a personal connection, and consciously declare: 'This is only a vessel. Hashem alone is the source of my blessing, and I trust in Him directly without any intermediaries.'