

הלכות עבודת פוכבים • פרק שלישי

Complete Word-for-Word Interlinear • Navy & Gold Edition

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, we begin to learn the practical halachos of how a person becomes liable for the terrible sin of avodah zarah, false worship. The Rambam teaches us the basic parameters of the prohibition, distinguishing between one who acts willingly, who is liable to kares or stoning, and one who acts inadvertently, who must bring a fixed sin offering. We will see how the Torah views the bizarre and repulsive ways the non-Jews devised to worship their idols, and how these specific practices define the legal liability of one who mimics them.

We will also learn a major principle in these halachos: the difference between the unique, bizarre service of a specific idol and the four universal services of the Beis HaMikdash. While a person is generally only liable for serving an idol in its own customary manner, there are four specific acts of worship—bowing, slaughtering, burning an offering, and pouring a libation—that make a person liable regardless of which idol he is serving, even if that is not its normal way of worship.

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

ה"א

עוֹבֵד פּוֹכְבִּים בְּזָדוֹן וּבְשִׁגְגָה

Halacha 1 • The Punishment for Serving False Gods Intentionally and Inadvertently

כָּל הָעוֹבֵד פּוֹכְבִּים בְּרָצוֹנוֹ בְּזָדוֹן חֵיב כִּרְת וְאִם הָיוּ שָׁם עֲדִים
witnesses there there were and if kares is liable for intentionally willingly stars who serves Anyone
וְהִתְרָאָה נִסְקָל. וְאִם עָבַד בְּשִׁגְגָה מֵבִיא קֶרֶבֶן חֹטֵאת קְבוּעָה:
fixed a sin offering a sacrifice of he brings inadvertently he served and if he is stoned and warning

This halacha outlines the different punishments for serving idols depending on whether the act was done willingly, with warning, or inadvertently.

ה"ב

חֵיב מִיתָה פְּעֻבֹדָה זָרָה בְּדַרְכָּהּ

Halacha 2 • Liability for Idolatry Only Through Its Specific Mode of Worship

עֲבוֹדוֹת הָרַבָּה קִבְּעוּ עוֹבְדֵי פּוֹכְבִּים לְכָל צֶלֶם וְצֶלֶם וְלִכְל צוּרָה
form and for every and image image for every stars worshipers of established many services
וְצוּרָה וְעֲבוֹדָתָהּ זֶה אֵינָה פְּעֻבֹדָתָהּ זֶה כְּגוֹן פְּעוֹר שֶׁעֲבוֹדָתוֹ
whose service is Peor for example this one like the service of is not this one and the service of and form
שֶׁפּוֹעֵר אָדָם עֲצָמוֹ לוֹ וּמַרְקוּלִים שֶׁעֲבוֹדָתוֹ שִׁיזָרַק לוֹ אֲבָנִים אוֹ יִסְקַל
he clears or stones to it that he throws whose service is and Marculis to it himself a person that uncovers
מִלִּפְנֵי אֲבָנִים וְהָרַבָּה עֲבוֹדוֹת כְּגוֹן אֵלֹהִים תִּקְנֻן לְשָׂאָר צִלָּמִים. לְפִיכָּה
therefore the images for the rest of they instituted these like services and many stones from before it
הַפּוֹעֵר עֲצָמוֹ לְמַרְקוּלִים אוֹ שִׁזָּרַק אֶבֶן לְפָעוֹר פְּטוּר עַד שֶׁיַּעֲבֹד אוֹתוֹ
it he serves until is exempt to Peor a stone who threw or to Marculis himself one who uncovers

דָּרָךְ עֲבוֹדָתוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר דְּבָרִים יב ל "אִיכָּה יַעֲבֹדוּ הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה אֵת

— these the nations did serve how 30 12 Devarim as it is said its service the way of

אֱלֹהֵיהֶם וְאֶעֱשֶׂה כֵּן גַּם אֲנִי". וּמִפְּנֵי זֶה הָעֲנִין צָרִיכִין בֵּית דִּין לֵידַע

to know law the house of are required matter this and because of I also so and I will do their gods

דְּרָכֵי הָעֲבוֹדוֹת, שָׂאִין סוּקְלִין עוֹבֵד כּוֹכָבִים עַד שִׂידְעוּ שׂוֹז הִיא

is that this they know until stars a worshiper of stone for we do not the services the ways of

דָּרָךְ עֲבוֹדָתוֹ:

its service the way of

This halacha establishes that one is only liable for capital punishment if they worship an idol in its specific, customary manner, requiring the Beis Din to be knowledgeable in various pagan rites.

ה'ל"ג

חִיּוּב עַל אַרְבַּע עֲבוֹדוֹת הַמִּיחָדוֹת לַשֵּׁם

Halacha 3 · Liability for the Four Services Unique to Hashem Even When Not the Customary Worship

וְאִזהָרָה שֶׁל עֲבוֹדוֹת אֱלֹהִים וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָהֶן הוּא מָה שֶׁכָּתוּב שְׁמוֹת כ ה

5 20 Shemos is written what is of them and the like these services of And the warning

"וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם". בְּמָה דְּבָרִים אֲמֹרִים בְּשָׂאֵר עֲבוֹדוֹת חוּץ מִמִּשְׁתַּחֲוָה

from bowing except services regarding other are said words In what serve them" "and do not

וְזוֹבַח וּמִקְטִיר וּמִנְסֵךְ. אֲבָל הָעוֹבֵד בְּאַחַת מִעֲבוֹדוֹת אֱלֹהִים

these of services with one one who serves but and pouring libations and burning incense and slaughtering

לְאַחַד מִכָּל מִינֵי עֲבוֹדָת כּוֹכָבִים חָיִב וְאֵף עַל פִּי שָׂאִין דָּרָךְ עֲבוֹדָתוֹ

its service the way of that is not though and even is liable stars worship of types of of all to one

בְּכָךְ. כִּיצַד. הִרִי שֶׁנֶּסֶךְ לַפְעוֹר אוֹ שְׂזִבַח לְמַרְקוּלִים חָיִב

is liable to Markulis who slaughtered or to Peor one who poured behold How so in this manner libations

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר שְׁמוֹת כב יט "זִבַּח לְאֱלֹהִים יִחָרֵם בְּלֹתִי לֹה' לְבַדּוֹ".

alone" to Hashem except shall be destroyed to the gods "He who slaughters 19 22 Shemos as it is said

זְבִיחָה בְּכָלֵל עֲבוֹדָה הִיְתָה וְלָמָּה יֵצֵאת לומר לָךְ מָה זְבִיחָה

slaughtering just as to you to say did it go out and why was service in the general category slaughtering of

מִיחָדָת שֶׁעוֹבְדִין בָּהּ לַשֵּׁם וְחָיִב הַזּוֹבַח לְאֵל אַחֵר סָקִילָה עָלֶיהָ

for it stoning other to a god the one who slaughters and is liable to the Name with it that they serve is unique

בֵּין הִיְתָה דָּרָךְ עֲבוֹדָתוֹ בְּזִבְיחָה אוֹ אִינָה בְּזִבְיחָה. אֵף כָּל עֲבוֹדָה

service every so with slaughtering it is not or with slaughtering its service the way of it was whether

שֶׁהִיא מִיחָדָת לַשֵּׁם אִם עֹבֵד בָּהּ לְאֵל אַחֵר בֵּין שֶׁהִיְתָה דָּרָךְ

the way of that it was whether other to a god with it he served if to the Name unique that is

עֲבוֹדָתוֹ בְּכָךְ בֵּין שֶׁאִינָה בְּכָךְ חָיִב עָלֶיהָ. לְכָךְ נֶאֱמַר שְׁמוֹת לד

34 Shemos it is said for this for it he is liable in this manner that it is not whether in this manner its service

יד "לא תשתחוה לאל אחר" לחיב על ההשתחויה אפלו אין דרך
the way of it is not even if the bowing for to obligate other" to a god bow down "do not 14

עבודתו בכך. והוא הדין למקטיר ומנסך. וזורק
and sprinkling and pours libations for one who burns is the law and it in this manner its service
incense

ומנסך אחד הוא:
it is one and pouring libations

This halacha teaches that performing any of the four primary Temple services—bowing, slaughtering, burning incense, or pouring libations—to an idol makes one liable, even if that is not the standard way that specific idol is worshipped.

הליך

דין המכבד עבודה זרה בדרך פזיון והמקבלה עליו כאלוה

Halacha 4 · Worshipping an Idol Through Disgraceful Acts and Accepting an Idol as a Deity

ספת לה צואה או שנסך לה עביט של מי רגלים חיב.
is liable feet water of of a chamber pot to it who poured a libation or feces to it smeared

שחט לה חגב פטור אלא אם כן היתה עבודתה בכך. וכן אם
if and likewise with this its worship was · · unless is exempt a locust to it one slaughtered

שחט לה בהמה מחסרת איבר פטור אלא אם כן היתה דרך עבודתה
its worship the way of was · · unless is exempt a limb lacking an animal to it one slaughtered

בכך. עבודת כוכבים שעובדין אותה במקל. שבר מקל בפניה חיב
is liable before it a staff one broke with a staff it that they worship stars worship of with this

ונאסרת. זרק מקל בפניה חיב ואינה נאסרת. שאין זריקת המקל
the staff throwing of because not forbidden but is not is liable before it a staff one threw and it is forbidden

כעין זריקת הדם שהרי המקל כמו שהוא והדם מתפזר. המקבל
one who accepts scatters and the blood it is as the staff for behold the blood sprinkling of is like

עליו אחד מכל מיני עבודת כוכבים כאלוה חיב סקילה. ואפלו הגביה
if he lifted and even stoning is liable as a god stars worship of types of from all one upon himself

לבנה ואמר לה אלי אתה וכן כל פיוצא בדבור זה חיב. ואפלו
and even is liable this to speech similar any and likewise you are my god to it and said a brick

חזר בו בתוך כדי דבור ואמר אין זה אלי אין חזרתו כלום אלא
but anything his retraction is not my god this is not and said speech the time of within · if he retracted

נסקל:
he is stoned

This halacha teaches that performing acts of disgrace to an idol can still incur liability, and that accepting any object as a god is a capital offense that cannot be immediately retracted.

הליך

העובד עבודת פוכבים כדרךה ואפלו עשה דרך בזיון חייב.

he is liable disgrace by way of he did and even if according to its way stars worship of One who serves

פיצד. הפוער עצמו לפעור כדי לבזותו או זרק אבן למרקוליס כדי

in order to Marculis a stone threw or to disgrace it in order to Peor himself one who exposes How so

לבזותו הואיל ועבודתו בכך חייב. ומביא קרבן על שגגתו:

his inadvertent for a sacrifice and brings he is liable is with this and its worship since to disgrace it transgression

This halacha teaches that even if one intends to disgrace an idol, if that act of disgrace is its prescribed form of worship, he is liable.

הליו

העובד מאהבה ומיראה ודברי כבוד לעבודת פוכבים

Halacha 6· Serving an Idol Out of Love or Fear and Acts of Deference to an Idol

העובד עבודת פוכבים מאהבה כגון שחשק בצורה זו מפני

because of this an image that he desired for example out of love stars worship of One who serves

מלאכתה שהיתה נאה ביותר. או שעבדה מיראתו לה שמא תרע לו

to him it do harm lest of it out of his fear that he served it or exceedingly beautiful that was its craftsmanship

כמו שהן מדמים עובדיה שהיא מיטיבה ומרעה. אם קבלה עליו

upon himself he accepted it if and does harm does good that it its worshipers imagine they just as

באלוה חייב סקילה ואם עבדה דרך עבודתה או באחת מארבע

of four in one or its service the way of he served it but if stoning he is liable to as a god

עבודות מאהבה או מיראה פטור. המגפף עבודת פוכבים והמנשק

and one who kisses stars worship of One who embraces he is exempt out of fear or out of love services

לה והמכבד והמריץ לפניה והמרחיץ לה והסד

and one who anoints it and one who washes before it and one who sprinkles and one who sweeps it water

והמלביש והמנעיל וכל פיוצא בדברי כבוד האלו עובר בלא

a negative transgresses these honor to matters of similar and all and one who puts shoes and one who dresses on

תעשה שנאמר ולא תעבדם, ודברים אלו בכלל עבודה הן.

they are service in the category of these and matters serve them and do not as it is said commandment

ואף על פי כן אינו לוקה על אחת מהן לפי שאינן בפרוש.

explicitly they are not because of them one for receive lashes he does not so though and even

ואם היתה דרך עבודתה באחד מכל הדברים האלו ועשהו לעבדה

to serve it and he did it these the things of all with one its service the way of was and if

חייב:

he is liable

This halacha delineates the liability for serving an idol out of personal affection or fear, and the status of non-sacrificial acts of honor toward an idol.

אסור כפיפה לפני עבודת כוכבים מפני מראית העין *Halacha 7 · Prohibition of Bending Down Before an Idol Due to Appearances*

יֵשֵׁב לוֹ קוֹץ בְּרַגְלוֹ לְפָנֵי עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים לֹא יִשָּׁח וְיִטְלֶנּוּ מִפָּנָיו
because and remove it he shall bend down not stars worship of before in his foot a splinter to him Sat
שְׁנֵי רָאָה כְּמִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָּהּ. נִתְפָּזְרוּ לוֹ מַעוֹת בְּפָנֶיהָ לֹא יִשָּׁח וְיִטְלֶם
and take them he shall bend down not in front of it money to him scattered to it like one bowing that it appears
מִפָּנָיו שְׁנֵי רָאָה כְּמִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָּהּ אֵלָּא יֵשֵׁב וְאַחֵר כֶּךָ יִטֹּל:
he shall take so and after he shall sit unless to it like one bowing that it appears because

One may not bend down to remove a splinter or collect scattered money in front of an idol because it creates the appearance of bowing to it.

אסור שתיה מפני מראית העין *Halacha 8 · Prohibition of Drinking from Statues Spouting Water Before an Idol*

בְּרִצּוּפוֹת הַמְקַלְחוֹת מִיָּם בְּפָנֵי עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים לֹא יִנִּיחַ פִּיו עַל
upon his mouth should he place not stars worship of before water that spout Statues
פִּיהֶם וְיִשְׁתֶּה מִפָּנָיו שְׁנֵי רָאָה כְּמִנְשֵׁק לְעֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים:
stars the worship of like kissing that it appears because and drink their mouth

This halacha prohibits drinking directly from the mouth of a water-spouting statue in front of an idol because it creates the appearance of kissing the idol.

האסור לעשות עבודת כוכבים לעצמו ולאחרים *Halacha 9 · The Prohibition of Making an Idol for Oneself or for Others*

הַעוֹשֶׂה עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים לְעַצְמוֹ אִף עַל פִּי שֶׁלֹּא עָשָׂה בְּיָדוֹ וְלֹא
and not with his hand he made it that not though · even for himself stars worship of One who makes
עֲבָדָה לֹקֵה שְׁנַאֲמַר שְׁמוֹת כ ד "לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ פֶּסֶל וְכָל
or any a carved image for yourself make "Do not 4 20 Shemos as it is said is lashed he worshiped it
תְּמוּנָה". וְכֵן הַעוֹשֶׂה עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים בְּיָדוֹ לְאַחֲרִים אֲפִלּוֹ עָשָׂה
he made it even for others with his hand stars worship of one who makes and likewise likeness"
לְעוֹבֵד כּוֹכָבִים לֹקֵה שְׁנַאֲמַר וַיִּקְרָא יט ד "וְאֱלֹהֵי מִסְכָּה לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה
make do not molten metal "and gods of 4 19 Vayikra as it is said is lashed stars for a worshiper of
לָכֶם". לְפִיכָךְ הַעוֹשֶׂה עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים בְּיָדוֹ לְעַצְמוֹ לֹקֵה שְׁתֵּים:
twice is lashed for himself with his hand stars worship of one who makes therefore for yourselves"

This halacha details the separate prohibitions and lashes incurred for commissioning an idol, making an idol for others, and making an idol with one's own hands for oneself.

אסור עשיית צורת האדם בולטת לנוי *Halacha 10 · The Prohibition of Making a Protruding Human Image for Decoration*

אֲסוּר לַעֲשׂוֹת צוּרוֹת לְנוֹי וְאִף עַל פִּי שְׁאִינָה עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים
stars worship of that it is not though · and even for decoration images to make It is forbidden

שְׁנֵאמַר שְׁמוֹת כ כ "לֹא תַעֲשֶׂוּן אִתִּי" כְּלוֹמַר צוּרוֹת שֶׁל כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב

and gold silver of images meaning to say with Me" make "Do not 20 20 Shemos as it is said

שֶׁאֵינָם אֵלָא לְנוֹי כְּדִי שְׁלֹא יִטְעוּ בָּהֶן הַטּוֹעִים וַיִּדְמוּ שֶׁהֵם

that they are and imagine those who err with them will err that not in order for decoration except which are not

לַעֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים. וְאִין אֲסוּר לְצוּר לְנוֹי אֵלָא צוּרַת הָאָדָם

the human the form of except for decoration to form prohibition and there is no stars for worship of

בְּלִבָּד. לְפִיכָּה אֵין מְצִירִים לֹא בָּעֵץ וְלֹא בְּסִיד וְלֹא בְּאֶבֶן צוּרַת

the form of in stone and not in plaster and not in wood not form we do not therefore alone

הָאָדָם. וְהוּא שֶׁתְּהִיָּה הַצּוּרָה בּוֹלֶטֶת כְּגוֹן הַצִּיּוֹר וְהַכִּיּוֹר שֶׁבְּטָרְקָלִין

that are in the hall and the carving the drawing for example protruding the image is when it is and this the human

וְכִיּוּצָא בָּהֶן וְאֵם צָר לוֹקָה. אֲכָל אִם הִיָּתָה הַצּוּרָה מְשֻׁקַּעַת אוֹ

or sunken the image was if but he receives lashes one formed and if to them and similar

צוּרָה שֶׁל סַמָּנִין כְּגוֹן הַצּוּרוֹת שֶׁעַל גְּבֵי הַלּוּחֹת וְהַטְּבָלִיּוֹת אוֹ צוּרוֹת

images or and the boards the tablets top of that are on the images for example colors of an image

שֶׁרוֹקְמִין בְּאַרְיֵג הָרִי אֵלּוֹ מִתְּרוֹת:

are permitted these behold in the weaving that they embroider

The Rambam explains that the Torah forbids making three-dimensional human forms even for decorative purposes, while flat or sunken images remain permitted.

ה'לי יא

אֲסוּר עֲשִׂית צוּרוֹת אָדָם וְגַמְי הַשָּׁמַיִם

Halacha 11 · The Prohibition of Fashioning Images of Man and Heavenly Bodies

טַבַּעַת שֵׁשׁ עָלֶיהָ חוֹתָם שֶׁהוּא צוּרַת אָדָם אִם הִיָּתָה הַצּוּרָה בּוֹלֶטֶת

protruding the form was if a man the form of which is a seal upon it that has A ring

אֲסוּר לְהַנִּיחָהּ וּמִתָּר לַחֲתֹם בָּהּ. וְאִם הִיָּתָה הַצּוּרָה שׁוֹקַעַת מִתָּר

it is permitted sunken the form was and if with it to seal but it is permitted to wear it it is forbidden

לְהַנִּיחָהּ וְאֲסוּר לַחֲתֹם בָּהּ מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהַנְּחָתָם תַּעֲשֶׂה בּוֹ הַצּוּרָה בּוֹלֶטֶת.

protruding the form in it will make their impression because with it to seal and it is forbidden to wear it

וְכֵן אֲסוּר לְצוּר דְּמוּת חֲמָה וּלְבָנָהּ כּוֹכָבִים מְזֻלוֹת וּמְלָאָכִים

and angels constellations stars and the moon the sun the likeness of to fashion it is forbidden and likewise

שְׁנֵאמַר שְׁמוֹת כ כ "לֹא תַעֲשֶׂוּן אִתִּי" גַּמְרָא רַאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה כַּד ב "לֹא תַעֲשֶׂוּן

make Do not b 24 Hashanah Rosh Gemara with Me make Do not 20 20 Shemos as it is said

כְּדָמוֹת שְׁמַשֵּׁי הַמְּשֻׁמָּשִׁין לְפָנַי בְּמָרוֹם" וְאֶפְלוּ עַל הַלּוּחַ. צוּרוֹת

forms of the tablet on and even on high before Me who serve My servants like the likeness of

הַבְּהֵמוֹת וּשְׂאֵר נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה חוּץ מִן הָאָדָם וְצוּרוֹת הָאֵילָנוֹת וְדִשְׁאִים וְכִיּוּצָא

and similar and grasses the trees and forms of man for except creatures living and other the beasts

בָּהֶן מִתָּר לְצוּר אוֹתָם וְאֶפְלוּ הִיָּתָה הַצּוּרָה בּוֹלֶטֶת:

protruding the form was and even if them to fashion it is permitted to them

This halacha delineates which forms and images are forbidden to be fashioned or worn, distinguishing between protruding and sunken seals, and between human or celestial forms and other living creatures.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter begins by establishing the punishments for serving false gods, whether done willingly or inadvertently. The Rambam explains that because gentiles established unique and often bizarre services for each idol—such as defecating before Pe'or or throwing stones at Marculis—a person is generally only liable if he worships the idol in its traditionally accepted manner, which requires the Beis Din to be knowledgeable in these pagan practices. However, the Torah singles out four specific services that are modeled after the avodah in the Beis HaMikdash—slaughtering, bowing, burning an offering, and pouring a libation (including sprinkling blood)—ruling that performing any of these four acts to any idol brings immediate liability, even if it is not the customary mode of worship for that particular deity.

למעשה WHAT TO TAKE HOME

My dear talmid, look at the incredible depth of what the Rambam is teaching us here. The Torah tells us that if a person worships an idol in its specific way, even if that way is completely bizarre, like throwing stones or doing something dirty and degrading, he is fully liable. Why? Because that is how that specific thing is served. But then the Torah adds that there are four special services, like bowing down or bringing an offering, that make a person liable no matter what, because these are the ultimate expressions of surrender and devotion that belong only to Hashem.

What is the deep avodah for us here? The yetzer hara is very clever. He doesn't come to a frum Yid and say, "Go worship an idol." Instead, he tries to get us to bow down and surrender our minds, our hearts, and our precious time to the modern "idols" of our generation, our phones, our careers, or the pursuit of honor. We might think, "I'm not really bound to these things, I'm just using them!" But the sugya teaches us that surrender is surrender. When you bow your head and give your entire focus to something other than Hashem, you are giving away a piece of your neshama's devotion to a foreign power.

We also see how careful we must be with our actions. The halachah says that if a coin falls in front of an idol, you cannot bend down to pick it up because it looks like you are bowing to it. A Yid must live with such a high level of yiras Shamayim that even the appearance of compromise is completely unacceptable. We must be pure, inside and out, ensuring that every single bend of our knee and every thought of our heart is directed "l'Hashem levado", to Hashem alone.

Today, notice where you direct your focus and devotion. When you feel the urge to immediately bow your head and surrender your attention to a distraction or a screen, pause for ten seconds, lift your eyes upward, and consciously declare that your mind and heart belong only to Hashem.